

THE JESSE JAMES STORIES

A WEEKLY DEALING WITH THE DETECTION OF CRIME

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No. 44.

Price, Five Cents.



BILL WILLIAMS DROPPED DEAD BEHIND HIS OWN BAR, WHILE JESSE JAMES COVERED SODGER JIM WITH THE STILL SMOKING REVOLVER.

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No. 44.

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Price Five Cents.

JESSE JAMES' SPY;

OR,

Corralling a Whole Town.

By W. B. LAWSON.

CHAPTER I.

CORRALLING A NEW TOWN.

"You say that Jesse James is a desperado, and that he should be shot at sight; well and good, so much I won't dispute. But when you call him a coward and a sneak, without a grain of fairness in him, that isn't so, Bill Williams, and I could put up the proof of it!"

"Wall, my young rooster, whoever ye may be, I ain't goin' to take back ary syllable that I've expostulated," said the great, hulking pilgrim who tended bar in the newest saloon in the latest town in South-eastern Arizona.

It was a bright morning, a few years ago. That the morning was bright need hardly have been mentioned of that section, however, except that it means that there was no wind stirring, and consequently no dust.

The first speaker was a well-built fellow of twenty-two, and as handsome as they make them.

"No offense intended by what I have said," returned he, in his quiet, positive way, "but, as you say, I am ready to stand by my statement. There are two sides to every man, and there is a better one to Jesse James than you often hear about."

"P'ticklar pard o' your'n, I reckon," chipped in a grizzled old loafer, who owed Williams a big score for drinks, and so made it a point to indorse all the bartender's remarks.

"He is not a friend of mine, in any sense of the word."

The younger man wheeled quickly as he said this, and there was a faint flush in his rather pale cheeks.

"Keep yer britches on, youngster—yer'd better!" growled a ranchman, in a low tone.

The name of Jesse James, the bandit king, had been introduced by the rumor that he had been lately seen, with a picked few of his outlaw band, kicking up the dust on the trail that led to this same new town.

There were bad men here already, playing their

dark games. There were fair men, also, who had enough to do to guard their interests against the sharps. It was generally understood that Jesse James was not the sort to wade in for a small scoop.

The mischief of it was, business in the new town grew so fast that some men with cash got together and started a bank—not of the faro kind. Shaving notes, carrying deposits subject to check, and negotiating securities, all with an eye to fairness and a decent profit were in the line of the new institution, and, of course, it would soon be incorporated as a national bank.

A railroad was building in that direction. But the town was of the “sooner” sort—it was started in anticipation of the railway. In a month or two more it would be all right; but now—well, as a center for a large aggregation of capital, it could not be recommended in the matter of safety.

The cashier of the bank had been held up as he was coming out of the bank the second day after it was running, but he was unexpectedly handy with a gun, and shot the desperado who had ordered him to throw up his dukes. It was a shot to kill; and the outlaw's mate did not stop to take his medicine.

The cashier, whose name was Grimes, was a gamey fellow. He did not so much as mention the incident; and, had there not been a witness in the barber-shop across the way, the story would not have been told.

As it was, of course the affair became no secret, and Grimes' reticence, and the matter-of-fact way in which he anted up for business behind the bank railing at the usual hour the next morning, inspired the shady element of the town with respect.

A second attempt of the sort had not been made. Already the money transactions of the bank were considerable.

At the end of the first month a balance-sheet was stuck up near the entrance to the institution, to show how she stood. It testified to a cash-on-hand item of twenty-three thousand dollars.

And now, the third day after the posting of the first statement of the new bank's assets, it was said that the James boys, with a picked gang, were making for the town.

That looked as if there must be a spy in the place.

This very suspicion had been suggested in the general talk in the Williams saloon, in the course of

which the young man we have introduced spoke a word in favor of Jesse James.

There were ugly looks thrown in the direction of the young fellow. The grizzled lounge saw that Williams was fingering a revolver; so he fingered his, though he knew there was not a cartridge in the cylinder.

He could still bluff Williams for a drink at the bar; but for the purchase of powder and provender he had long been at the end of his slate.

The young man, who registered at the hotel as Melton Gay, seemed not to realize that he had aroused a dangerous suspicion against himself by what may have been an idle remark in praise of the noted king of border desperadoes.

The saloon was half-full of loungers, but they were of the lazy, loafing sort, who are made stupid rather than ugly by bad whisky, and only two or three of them seemed to take any interest in the discussion.

Melton Gay noted the menacing action of Williams and his toady, and that was the first suggestion he had of the meaning which had been drawn from his speech. He ought to have known that it was a good time to qualify his words, or to take them back, if he were not of the quick-shooting fraternity.

But he did nothing of the kind, nor did he do the other thing—that is, pull a gun and get his back against the wall. In other words, he behaved just like a tenderfoot with plenty of nerve. Perhaps he wanted to die.

“Say, youngster, push out a gun and back up agin' suthin', fer Lawd sake!” hoarsely whispered the friendly ranchman.

“You say the James boys and their crowd are reported as on the trail toward this here town?” queried Williams, addressing the man with the empty revolver.

“It air so declared over to the bank. My friend, Grimes, ther cashyeer, says he reckins that Jesse wants to throw in a note and draw out ther deposits.”

“Jesse James ain't no claryvoyant to git news of the business at the bank in this town without some human cuss to do the spyin'. And who is there here but we knows suthin' about? Not a dozen, count 'em all up. And who is there that says a good word for Jesse? Not ary one, savin' and excludin' the starched and b'iled rooster right thar! Gents, I ain't of the hasty sort, and, bein' sort of dependent for biz on ther good nature of the people, I'm willin' to leave

it to a vote of the majority as to whether we shoots the youngster full er holes and then investigates, or as to whether we investigate and then shoots? Bein' as I holds ther drop on ther rooster, I'll 'low yer half a minute for deliberations."

Sodger Jim—which was the title by which the saloon-keeper's toady was quick to respond to a call up to the bar on a treat—cast his red-rimmed eyes around the room, and swelled out his stomach with importance.

His reference to Grimes, the cashier, as "his friend" was calculated to gain him a special hearing.

"For me, half-a-minute is too long for that sort of a deliberation, when it comes to pertectin' the int'rests of my friend Grimes' institootion," he observed.

With which he brought his empty shooter to a level with Melton Gay's ear.

Another unsteady hand in the crowd fumbled with a revolver. But only Williams' was dangerous.

He felt that there was no adverse sentiment in the room, and, being a born sneak, that pricked up his courage to shoot.

His finger pressed the trigger and—bang!

Not from the barkeeper's gun, though. That dropped to the floor with a thump, and popped harmlessly up against the wall.

Something else dropped—and it was Williams himself.

And there he lay, behind his own bar, without ever a kick. Out by the open door a revolver smoked, even while it covered Sodger Jim. Behind it was a stern-eyed, broad-shouldered stranger.

A squeal like that of a frightened pig came from the lips of Jim, and he dropped his gun and waved his flabby palms in the air in an ecstasy of terror and submission.

"I was jest a-foolin', stranger! The gun's empty as a whisky bottle—true as I'm a sinner!" he whined.

"Pick it up!"

The command came in a stern tone from the one in the doorway, who had shot Bill Williams.

"It hain't got ary cartridge in it!"

"Pick it up, I say."

Sodger Jim obeyed.

"Press the muzzle against your breast."

That order, too, was complied with.

"I see it is a five-shooter, self-cocking. Hold it

there and snap it five times. That'll either prove you a truth-teller, for once, or kill a liar!"

"Lawd, mister, if there happined to be just one shot left in the gun—I may have forgot, ye know!" whined Jim.

"Pull away or I'll test mine. Mayhap I've forgot to load. Trust your memory or mine—your choice!"

The stern lips of the speaker relaxed just a trifle as he said this.

Sodger Jim squinted down at his weapon, his face white as a sheet. A moment before he had been sure that there was not a cartridge in the cylinder; but now there loomed up a score of possibilities that he might have been mistaken.

He was miserable; but he didn't feel like committing suicide. He was a coward; every shake of his besotted limbs told of the fact. That was why the man in the doorway smiled. He knew that Sodger Jim would rather live a coward than to die a hero.

Snap—snap!—and no harm done. Then Jim paused to take breath.

A silence like that of a funeral reigned in the saloon. The stupid members of the crowd were wide awake, and interested spectators of the farce which was being played at the end of the tragedy.

"Come, there are three more!" said the man in the doorway.

Snap—then a long pause. Then one more snap, and then another squint of Jim's watery eyes at the cylinder. He was reeking with sweat.

"Pull away—only one chance more to be your own executioner," reminded the stranger.

Snap!—and nothing more. There had not been a cartridge in Sodger Jim's gun for a week, and he ought to have been certain of it.

"Now, give the shooter here," said the stranger, stepping into the room and casting an eagle glance from face to face of the inmates.

"And, gentlemen, I'm making a collection of shooters to-day, and want yours—every one. Toss 'em into a pile right by that chair, and quick about it!"

The ranchman who had seemed friendly to Melton Gay was first to obey this order, but the others were quick to follow until only Gay and the stranger had a revolver on his person.

"You will have to chip yours into the collection, young fellow, in spite of the decent word you spoke for Jesse James. That saved your life from Williams'

attempt, but I can't do more for you till I know more—you savvy?"

Melton Gay stared at the stranger with whitening cheeks.

"You—you are not——" he faltered.

"Yes, I am," said the other. "I am Jesse James, and I have corralled this town!"

"My God!" gasped Melton. And still a revolver hung at his hip. He was like a man in a dream.

CHAPTER II.

THE TAKING OF SODGER JIM.

It was Jesse James who roused Melton Gay from the strange apathy into which he seemed to have been thrown by the disclosure of the identity of the cool stranger who had saved his life.

The bandit king stepped to the side of the young man and took the weapon from his hip. The other made a quick attempt to seize it—but he was too late.

"You're under my care now, youngster, and so won't need the gun," said the desperado.

His tones, in striking contrast to those in which the orders to the other inmates had been given, were almost kindly.

Was it the manifestation of a new trait in the character of this strange man?

It will take more than one chapter of this tale to explain it.

At that moment several of the inmates of the saloon made a concerted movement toward the door. They thought the outlaw did not see them. But he wheeled quick as a flash.

Bang!—one of the men fell in his tracks, without so much as a moan.

The others scurried back like a lot of frightened rabbits. Sodger Jim had not been one of those to attempt to escape, but he sidled up to Jesse James with a fawning squirm.

"I—I'm the sort to stand by a brave man, Mr. James," he began.

But the back of the outlaw's hand struck the fellow full on the mouth, and he reeled.

"I've no breath to waste on you," said the outlaw. Then to the ranchman who had warned Melton Gay to be cautious:

"You look to have more wit than the rest of this crew, and I take it that you know my reputation well enough not to try any monkey tricks. I just said

that I had corralled this town. It is true. You know there are only two trails that will lead a man clear of it—by way of the pass and the cañon?"

The ranchman nodded.

"Well, I have them both plugged up with a crew of men that you wouldn't like to try to fight a way through."

"All right, mister," said the ranchman, coolly.

"I have had a spy here for a week. You have a few gamey men here, but you aren't organized. If I could only depend on two or three of you to peddle out a little good advice, it would save the lives of some men that it would be a pity to shoot."

The ranchman nodded again.

An oath leaped from the lips of Jesse James.

"Can you do nothing but bob your head like a dummy?" he cried.

"I didn't know prezactly what yer was drivin' at, and I ain't the sort ter grin and gabble like a durned female woman, without ary thing to say for it."

"If I merely wanted to hold up the new bank and two or three citizens, I might do it inside of an hour, and get out of town. But I want to do more. This appears to be a pretty good place, and I don't care to amble out of it as if I wasn't wanted here. I come with my friends to tarry with you a bit."

Again the ranchman nodded, a faint grin relaxing his lips. Jesse James seemed to be in better humor, perhaps because the old fellow did not appear like a sneak.

While the bandit king made it his business to inspire terror of his very name in every breast, he, nevertheless, despised those who caved too readily, and who fawned upon him, pretending to be half-friendly while really hating him.

At the same time, his answer to actual disobedience to any command was always a bullet, straight to heart or brain.

"You two gentlemen," he went on, indicating the ranchman and Melton Gay, "are of the kind to keep a pledge, if you gave one."

"That's right, fur as I can speak for the pair on us."

"Then I'm disposed to let you go on parole, if you will bind yourselves by a promise to take no hand in any game against us for four days."

The ranchman and Gay were both silent.

Just then three men came into the saloon. Jesse James seemed not to see them.

Dave Wheeler, the ranchman, recognized one as Frank James, the brother of Jesse. The other two were members of the gang.

At that moment there was not a store, saloon, barber-shop or other public resort in the town without two or more members of the outlaw gang on guard.

Only the bank was exempt, and this was due to the promptness and nerve of Grimes, as well as to the fact that Jesse James had given no positive orders to take possession of the place immediately.

He had laid his plans so carefully, and felt so sure of winning the whole game, that he wanted to add a new laurel to his reputation by playing a particularly cool hand.

He meant not only to scoop the assets of the new bank, but to take anything else that he might take a fancy to in the town.

"There is no time for palaver," said the stern tones of the outlaw chief, still addressing Dave Wheeler.

"Why don't ye put ther terms to the young feller. Or, maybe, ye count him out of it."

"One at a time. Do you, on your honor, give me the pledge I have just named?"

"And must I stay right here in the town till the time's up?"

"All the citizens will have to do that."

"Ye ain't goin' to give any travelin' privileges?"

"Nary a privilege."

"And a try for the open risks gittin' busted in two with a gun?"

"It isn't a matter of risk, but a dead sure penalty."

"I reckon I'll give ye the pledge."

"Up with your right hand, and make it solemn."

Dave Wheeler obeyed.

Jesse James turned to Melton Gay, who had retreated to the side of the room, and stood leaning against the wall as if he were either in deep dejection, or overpowered by some emotion.

"Melton Gay," said the bandit king.

The young man turned with a start.

"Did you hear the pledge I just took from your friend yonder?"

"Yes, I heard it. But why do you need to impose it on me? You just saved my life. I am a man of honor, and that counts for something."

"You will have to take the pledge. If I have reason to suspect that you intend to break it, there isn't

a life in the town that I would hold as cheaper than yours."

"All right. I will take the pledge—with one condition."

"There are no conditions that you can name. I make them, if there are to be any."

"Wait—hear what I have to say. Noel Grimes, cashier of the new bank, must not be killed. He is a brave man, and I would stand betwixt your gun and his body."

This speech elicited a low laugh from Frank James, who seemed to be an interested listener to the negotiations.

"You might put a piece of paper betwixt 'em, youngster—it would do just as much good, and save having the lungs shot out of ye."

"Noel Grimes, as you call him, will have to save his own life, or lose it. You can do nothing for him," said Jesse James, quickly.

"You will give him more than the ordinary call. He is not the sort to throw up his hands because he is told to do it."

"The worse for him, then. What is one man to me more than another?"

"You are giving me a special show now. That proves that all are not alike to you."

"Bah!—give me the pledge, or, curse you, I will swear you in as a member of my gang, and shoot you at the first hint of treachery," snarled the outlaw chief.

Melton Gay did not hesitate longer. He knew that he was facing death, and why should he die without having gained better terms for the one for whom he pleaded mercy.

"Frank," said the younger of the James brothers, turning his back on Gay as if he expected never to see him again, "you can line up these pilgrims for any kind of an oath that you think will hold them. Shoot the first kicker at his first kick. Wait—boost that shivering cuss this way. I want to take him with me."

Sodger Jim got the knee of one of the outlaws in the small of his back, and he brought up in a groaning heap at the feet of the bandit king.

"Get up, and follow me!" ordered Jesse James.

Sodger Jim got up and followed.

As they went out, there was a sound of shooting on the street, in front of the newly established postoffice.

Jesse James' horse was waiting patiently at the

door of the saloon. He flung himself into the saddle, saying to Sodger Jim:

"Follow close, pilgrim—see that you don't let me leave you out of sight, or I'll have to shoot you in."

"Oh, Lawd!" groaned Sodger Jim.

He was not built for sprinting, but the stern look and tones of Jesse James held him like a slave.

The horse went up the street at an easy canter, and Sodger Jim, sweating and puffing, managed to keep alongside.

"He'll serve me better than a nigger!" muttered the outlaw chief.

"—I can't keep up—much furdur!" panted Jim.

Jesse James swung a revolver toward the gasping figure.

"Shall I put you out of your misery?"

"No, no—Lawd, no!"

"Then wag your pins. That's right."

Sodger Jim wagged them, and so proved what a man may do when his miserable life hangs in the balance. He kept alongside of the horseman until the postoffice was reached.

There a scene in the drama of the new town was being enacted. Cole Younger and Hank Starr, with two other followers of Jesse James, were shooting in at the windows of the postoffice. There was now and then an answering pop from the other side of the sash, from which all the glass had been smashed.

As Jesse James rode up, some one within opened the door a crevice and thrust out a Winchester.

Crack!—but at such an angle that no harm was possible to the outlaws.

The door swung open wider—a hand and arm appeared behind the Winchester.

Crack!—again.

This time it was from the revolver of Jesse James.

The Winchester dropped, and before the door could slam shut the bandit king sprang up the steps.

CHAPTER III.

JESSE JAMES' WAY OF RUNNING A POSTOFFICE.

There were two men and a boy inside the postoffice.

In the place was kept a stock of general merchandise, and the proprietor was postmaster. The boy, who was not more than fourteen, was his son. The other man was a clerk, and it was he who was doing most of the shooting.

The proprietor had counseled surrender without resistance. The clerk had been a stage-driver, and was full of fight.

As Jesse James sprang into the building the stage-driver leaped toward him, firing as he did so.

The bandit was untouched.

Crack!—from his revolver, and the man went down.

The postmaster flung up his hands.

"No use losing life, and the game, too!" he exclaimed.

Jesse gave the man a sharp glance from his keen eyes.

"Any more here?" he demanded.

"Nary a one."

"Pass out your guns, then."

The man had only a single pistol, and that he gave up with the air of one who was glad to get rid of it.

The firing outside had not ceased, although, of course, there was no further demonstration from the interior of the postoffice building. The reason for this was that a half-dozen citizens from a place at the opposite end of the street had gotten together with a miscellaneous lot of guns, with which they were banging at the mounted desperadoes at long range.

It was a kind of fusillade which was noisy rather than sanguinary. Younger and Starr paid little attention to it until the crew came within closer range. Then they opened a return fire, sent three of the citizens to the dust, and the rest of them scuttling to cover.

This was what was going on outside—or a part of it, at least, to show that the men of the new town were not being "corralled" without an effort to clear themselves.

It has often been wondered at that Jesse James seldom failed to hold up a train, or even a town, when he made the attempt, even when the odds were naturally very heavy against him.

The secret may be easily explained.

The bandit king never bandied words when bullets would talk quicker and surer.

His men all had the same orders; and often he gave them orders to show no quarter, when, if he had been the one to do the shooting, he would not have cared to shed innocent and defenseless blood.

In other words, mercy and quarter were never to be gained except when there was a chance for a direct personal appeal to him.

His commands to men when they were not to do all their fighting at his side, were these:

"When sure of your man, shoot; when in doubt about him, shoot; when you have the drop, shoot; when he has it, trick him by pretending to cave, then shoot. Never give a man your gun as long as there is lead inside of it."

Need anybody wonder that such rules as these, carried out almost to the letter, gained for Jesse James the reputation of being invincible?

So, when he heard the firing out on the street of the new town, the bandit chief did not so much as take the trouble to look out and see what was the meaning of it.

The bank, as he knew, had a cordon of his best men drawn around it. He knew that Grimes, the

cashier, would try to do some killing before he surrendered his trust, and of all the men in the town there was not another—excepting Melton Gay—that Jesse James had the least compunctions about killing.

This, in brief, represents the conditions as they stood while the chief of the outlaws was himself taking possession of the postoffice.

As matters stood, there was no call for haste. The town was his already. The small details of keeping it in order could be managed as they came along.

"Now, man," he said to the postmaster, "I shall have use for you, if you like living on the best terms you can get. How often do you receive a mail here?"

"Once a day."

"How many go out?"

"One."

"Has there been one either way to-day?"

"No."

"When does it come in?"

Riggsley—which was the postmaster's name—looked at the clock. He had been all of a tremor; but now he was calming down, for a possible sphere of usefulness loomed up before him.

"It's due in half-an-hour."

"All right. And do you have a pouch made up to send right out as soon as the stage gets in?"

"The driver stops to eat his dinner, changes horses, spends half-an-hour in Bill Williams', and then starts on his return trip. He goes about three o'clock."

"Bill Williams doesn't run any place just now, unless they have 'em in hades. I'm proprietor of his shop, but business will go on at the old stand just the same. I'll see that your people don't go thirsty. You've a lot of letters to go out, I suppose?"

"A pretty good bunch of them."

"Shovel them out on the counter there, and we'll look them over. Any registered packages?"

Riggsley hesitated. He was a sworn servant of the government, and he could not aid a robber to seize the matter intrusted to his care, unless—

Jesse James observed his hesitation.

"I can run a postoffice as well as I can a saloon, and I don't know as I've any use for you, anyhow," he said, as he slowly brought a revolver up to a level.

"There's no help for it, and I'll do anything you say," cried Riggsley.

Jesse James, as a matter of fact, preferred just then not to work up too big a quarrel with the United States Government, as there were some old scores which he knew the deputies were anxious to settle with him.

"All right, postmaster. Trot out the stuff that has got to go out, and we'll see how it looks."

Riggsley hauled out a square soap box, which was placed under the letter slit for the deposit of mail, and dumped the contents on the counter.

As is usual in a young and booming town, there was a good quantity of mail matter sent out and received every day. Much of it was of value, although there were the usual "letters home" from the new arrivals.

There were several registered letters to go out, all containing money. The amounts of these were mostly small, but they amounted to considerable in the aggregate.

But this was not all.

The place had just been made a money-order office, and some hundreds of dollars had been deposited for which orders on other offices had been written.

This cash was in a safe in the office.

These facts were quickly drawn out in answer to the inquiries of Jesse James. The latter was, indeed, as capable of running the business of the postoffice as was the real incumbent.

Having obtained possession of everything that had a cash value in the office, Jesse James proceeded to investigate the contents of some of the ordinary letters which had been mailed, either on that morning or since the departure of the mail on the previous day.

The addresses of most of them did not interest him, and he did not even take the trouble to open them.

There were a few which he opened and read.

One of these elicited a muttered oath.

A dark flame leaped into his cheeks, and he leaped to his feet, holding the opened letter in his hand.

"Riggsley!" he exclaimed, "look at that envelope, and tell me who addressed it! If you equivocate, curse you, I'll shoot the skin off you, inch by inch!"

The postmaster stared at the address, and studied the handwriting.

The eyes of Jesse James watched every expression of his countenance.

"God help me!" muttered the postmaster.

"Who wrote that address?" repeated the bandit.

"I don't know."

"You don't know!" mimicked Jesse James.

Riggsley was looking into an iron tube, which had dealt death to more men, probably, than any other in the whole country.

"It is true—true! I don't know who wrote that letter. But it was mailed by—I think——"

He hesitated. The muzzle of the revolver bumped against his nose.

"By Mabel Grimes, the bank cashier's daughter!"

CHAPTER IV.

JESSE JAMES PUMPS FOR POINTERS.

The letter which excited so much interest in the outlaw chief was addressed to the sheriff of the county, and it communicated the fact that informa-

tion had been given of a meditated visit to the new town from Jesse James and his gang of marauders.

The signature was plainly that of a fictitious name. No other special precautions had been used in the writing of it, and certainly the address was plain enough.

The writer may have foreseen the possible interception of the letter, and so had guarded against the too ready discovery of his own identity.

The bandit chief lowered his weapon, and for the moment he seemed to forget the presence of Riggsley altogether.

He appeared to labor under a singular agitation as a consequence of the answer the postmaster had given him.

Outside there was an increasing hubbub, made up of shouts, gruff laughter, yells of terror and cries for mercy, and the occasional report of a firearm.

The sounds were of such a peculiar character that Jesse James would ordinarily have ascertained the occasion of them. But, instead, he seemed to be absorbed in a sudden train of reflections, or disturbed by some problem of action which he did not know how to solve.

Riggsley stared and wondered. He saw that the outlaw held the letter partially crumpled in his hand, while he allowed the revolver to lie on the edge of the counter without touching it.

But he suddenly roused himself, caught up the weapon, gave Riggsley a quick look, and then said:

"You say Grimes' daughter mailed this letter. That doesn't mean that she wrote it. Was it put in with the letters sent out by the bank?"

"No."

"It seems to me that you are devilish certain on that point. When I asked you the question I didn't expect you kept tally of all the letters posted here, and just who dropped them into the box. I reckon you are telling me the yarn just because you think I expect something, and that any kind of a yarn will do."

"That isn't so. The young lady came in not an hour ago, and hadn't a stamp to put on a letter that she had in her hand. I told her to give me the money and that I would stick on the stamp. That is how I happen to be so sure."

"All right—that sounds more plausible. And it was only an hour ago, you say?"

"Not much more than that."

"Where did she go after leaving here?"

"I think she went over to the bank to see her father."

"Then it's likely that she is there now. Come, old man, since you seem to know so much about the mail that waltzes through this office, you probably know the handwriting of this same young lady. Is that so?"

"I have seen considerable of it, though it aren't my business to take particular notice."

"Well, then, did she address this letter?"

"I'm pretty sure she didn't."

"How about the writing inside of it?"

"It isn't hers."

"Is it her father's?"

"I don't think so."

"And you are sure it doesn't look familiar?"

"I may have seen the same before, but I couldn't swear to it."

Jesse James seldom spent so much time on what would seem like a trifling matter. Yet it was not unusual for him to follow with all the patience and care of a detective a clew to anything like suspected treachery on the part of any member of his gang, or one acting as a spy on him.

This was the secret of his thorough and searching questions. He had had a spy in the town to inform him when a raid would be likely to prove profitable. Now, by this letter, it appeared that some one had discovered his intention, though not in season to give adequate warning to the citizens of the town.

This letter in which the bandit king showed such deep interest was, in substance, as follows:

I have been warned that an attack on this town for purposes of wholesale robbery is being planned by the James boys and their gang. It is imminent, and if you can not get here in time to prevent it, if this reaches you, you may at least intercept the outlaws in their flight from the town.

The letter had no signature, and, for that matter, it needed none.

What troubled Jesse James most was the fact that the information could not have been given to the writer except by one of his own spies, or by some one in whom the spy had confidence.

Jesse James would have given then more for information that would nail the guilt of the spy than for assurance that all the treasure in the town would be his.

"Death to treachery!" he hoarsely muttered.

Meanwhile, the uproar out on the street became greater.

Melton Gay and Dave Wheeler, talking earnestly together, walked down from the Williams saloon.

They could see that Jesse James had truthfully stated the situation.

The outlaws were already practically in possession of the town, and there seemed to be little show for any citizens who might try to make resistance.

Mounted men were riding up and down the street, shooting at the heads that now and then appeared at windows, driving the few market men and others who were attending to their duties on the street to cover.

This was easy to do, for the very sound of hostile shooting, coupled with the name of Jesse James ut-

tered on every side, was sufficient to send them scurrying out of sight like jack-rabbits.

It was some time before Melton Gay and Dave Wheeler reached the vicinity of the postoffice. When they did so they were in time to witness a comical farce.

Cole Younger, Hank Starr and half-a-dozen others of the James gang stood in a semi-circle about a post on the opposite side of the street from the post-office.

On the top of the post sat Sodger Jim, his legs curled up, his head bare, his hands clinging, his face the picture of terror and every other kind of misery that a coward may suffer.

"For the Lawd's sake, gentlemen, good gentlemen, heer what I hev ter say to yer!" he was saying, as Gay and Wheeler came up.

"Heer, heer!" mimicked Younger.

"In the fust place, gentlemen, I'm a veteran of the late wah!" howled Sodger Jim.

"Heer, heer!" roared Starr.

"I was wounded in the hip, and starved in the hoss-pittle, and the gover'ment didn't even give me a pension?"

"Which side was ye on—the North or the South?" demanded Hank Starr, with a sudden assumption of sternness.

Sodger Jim squirmed. He looked around on the crowd, and tried to make out whether it were safer to claim allegiance with the Federal or Confederate side in the great "unpleasantness..

"Why—er—ther South most er ther time," he said.

Starr and Younger uttered simultaneous roars of pretended fury.

Bang—bang!

Both of them fired at the dangling legs of Sodger Jim. They were not the sort to miss so good a mark at that distance, and yet they did not do him serious injury, it being their purpose, rather, to leave their marks on him.

"Shoot him ter pieces, the durned rebel!" roared Starr.

"Push the lead into the traitor to his country!" howled Younger.

"I—I was mistookn!" groaned Sodger Jim, betwixt his yells of terror and pain.

"It was sich a durned long while ago, and my mem'ry is sorter poor, anyhow. Come to think on't, I fit clean through the wah under the Stars and Stripes!"

"Yow—yow!—the cursed Yankee!" howled two or three others among his tormentors.

"Shoot the legs off'n the durned Yank!"

Bang, bang, bang!

"Trim his boot heels!"

"This is what ye call brandin' calves!"

"Ow!—marcy—marcy, on a poor, old soldier!" wailed Sodger Jim.

At this juncture Jesse James came out to the door of the postoffice.

He smiled grimly as he observed the antics of Sodger Jim. Then his stern tones rang out.

"That will do—let the poor devil loose!"

In an instant Sodger Jim was released from his awkward and painful position.

"Come here, you sneak!" ordered the bandit chief, catching the eye of the whining coward.

Jim limped across the road, and up the steps.

A roar of laughter followed, and he heard the banging of Winchesters further down the street. As he believed that every shot was designed to end his precious life, he cast apprehensive glances over his shoulder, and scuttled to the side of Jesse James in a fever of anxiety to gain his protection.

"Come in, Sodger Jim," ordered Jesse.

He accompanied the command by a push that sent the man headlong across the threshold.

Jesse paused outside to give one or two terse orders to his men, and then returned to the interior of the office.

With a gun at the head of Sodger Jim, he put in ten minutes of close pumping for pointers. And the effort was not wholly a vain one, as results were to prove.

CHAPTER V.

"TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN."

Jesse and Frank James, with their followers, had not pursued their most usual course in making the attack on the town.

Ordinarily, they started in terrorizing a place by riding furiously along the streets and shooting at everything in sight.

Then they usually entered the bank and made their cash haul, and after another shooting act on the street they would ride out of the town again.

Their entrance and exit was usually like that of a cyclone.

In the present case their action at the start had been in the line of strategy. They had actually gained possession of the town before the majority of the citizens knew that there was anything the matter.

It had been their intention to seize everything in the bank immediately. But, on approaching the door of the institution, they found it closed and locked, and evidently so barricaded as to make them considerable trouble before they could enter it and seize the plunder.

This was the first intimation that Jesse James had that any one in the town had been warned of his intended visit.

It was here, too, that they met with their first

resistance. A well-aimed shot from one of the windows had sent one of the outlaws to the dust in front of the bank building.

Such marksmanship, with the advantage of position wholly with the enemy, decided Jesse James to act more cautiously in that quarter. It was too much like attacking a fortress while exposed to its fire.

While Jessie James was interviewing Sodger Jim, Melton Gay and Dave Wheeler passed into a side street near the bank.

"Wall," said Dave, "our posish in the present dif-fikilty is sorter peculiar, with a chance of its gittin' monotonous."

"I am not worrying about the monotony," returned Melton.

"I reckon that in dealin' with a cuss of the measure of Jesse James, a man is pretty nigh justified in breaking his parole."

"No," said Gay, sharply; "I will not do that, nor allow it."

"Oh, yer won't," chuckled Dave, with a shrug. "Glad ye told me, 'cause I would be afeard to do a thing that ye said I mustn't."

Gay gave the older man a keen glance, but made no retort to this speech. His mind was on another matter, and if there was a bit of sarcasm in the words of the old ranchman he did not take the trouble to pick it up.

"Look at the bank yonder," he said. "It is evidently barricaded within, and surrounded without. I am sure that Miss Mabel Grimes is there with her father. Now, Mr. Grimes might find it to his interest to be more friendly toward me."

"You're sweet on the gal, I've hear'n."

"I do not blush to admit that I love Mabel Grimes, and it is equally certain that she loves me in return."

"And the old man don't favor ye?"

"He has forbidden her to marry me."

"Tough lines, ain't they? Lawd!—this would be a good chance to git hold of the gal and a couple of good hosses and light out. Ye an't pertick'ler whether or no ye're spliced in this town or some other, I reckon."

Melton Gay compressed his lips.

"Mr. Grimes is a keen man, and a brave one, but he had taken an unaccountable prejudice against me."

"What air his objections? Has he named 'em?"

"He says that I am a comparative stranger, and—"

The young man hesitated, and Dave gave him a sharp look.

"Suspicious, eh?" he ventured.

"Yes."

"What about?"

"You heard what was said in the saloon before Jesse James came in and shot Bill Williams."

"Erbout your bein' a spy?"

"Yes. Grimes seems to entertain a similar suspicion."

"Wall, I s'pose thar must be reasons of some sort. The talk had to begin somehow."

"The reasons with him are, I believe, the same as those that made the talk in the saloon. I have once or twice spoken of Jesse James as a man not wholly bad. In that I speak from a conviction which I have good reason to hold. You know that just now, in shooting Bill Williams, he saved my life."

"That's right, youngster. But there's them that would count his marcy to ye as agin' ye."

"He spared you, and placed you on parole on the same terms that he did me."

"He heerd me caution ye. He reckined we was pard. I tell ye, it all counts agin' ye in the eyes of the crowd."

"And does it with you, Dave Wheeler?"

The eyes of the two men met.

The hand of the ranchman went out and caught that of the younger man and gripped it hard.

"Yer eyes air honest as the sun, and I'll be durned if I'm goin' ter suspish agin' ye till I hes better reason than I have seen yit."

"Thank you. It is good to feel that I have a friend."

"Somebody besides Jesse James, too. He is Hail-Columby on the shoot, and I reckon he sticks by himself and his brother Frank pretty good. But I'm durned if I keer to depend on him for a pard."

"He is a brave man, and can be true to a friend, when he is sure that a friend is true to him. But I take it that he has found real friendships a pretty rare article. It embitters a man to have those he believes to be true prove false."

"That's right. That's why everybody hates a spy, and thinks death too good for one."

Again Melton Gay gave a keen glance at the face of his companion.

It almost seemed to him that Dave Wheeler had a lurking suspicion that the young man might not be just what he seemed—that there might be an unstated reason for the good words spoken for Jesse James.

They approached nearer to the bank building, but from a narrow street that had been laid out to the rear of the main thoroughfare of the new town.

The structure in which the bank had been established was two stories in height, built of wood, but in all respects the most substantial of any building that had yet been completed in the place.

Several others of a better character were being built, however, and in one of these Grimes intended to have the banking rooms as soon as they were ready.

He had, however, taken pains to have the building which he was then occupying made as stanch as

possible, against any possible attack by desperadoes, which contingency he had seemed to foresee from the start.

Melton Gay had the best of reasons for believing that Mabel was in the building with her father. He was in a fever of impatience to open communication with her.

He knew that Mr. Grimes would be very anxious in her behalf, and he felt that the man's favor might be gained in some degree if he—Gay—were to do something to secure her safety.

The building was surmounted by a cupola, with four windows.

As Gay glanced toward this, he saw something dart from one of the windows, flying obliquely upward.

The next moment the object fell in the narrow street, a short distance from where they were standing.

It was an arrow, and, as Melton sprang to pick it up, he saw that there was a slip of paper tied on near the feather end of the missile.

"Wall, wall!" ejaculated Dave Wheeler.

Melton stripped off the paper, and found that a message was written on the inside of it.

As he read it, his face became as white as a sheet, and there was a husky sound in his throat.

Wheeler watched his countenance curiously, but asked no questions.

There was a moment of silence. Then Melton Gay looked his companion in the face.

"You have just promised to trust me. Read this, and I will know whether or not your confidence is of the sort to stand a test."

Wheeler scanned the plainly-written message, which was as follows:

To Whom It May Concern: Every honest citizen is hereby informed that I, Noel Grimes, believe that a spy informed Jesse James, the desperado, of a chance for a rich haul in this town, and that the spy is no other than the young, plausible-appearing man calling himself Melton Gay. I advise that he be shot at sight!

(Duplicate No. 5.)

CHAPTER VI.

"HIS FRIENDS ARE FOES, WHILE HIS FOES ARE FRIENDS."

"Gee-whillikins!" exclaimed Dave Wheeler, as the significance of the writing dawned upon him.

"Now what do you think of me?" demanded Melton.

"Why, that tells me, if I'm an honest citizen, to shoot ye at sight!"

"Well, you see me."

"But I ain't got no gun!"

"Nor have I, or I should be tempted to turn the muzzle against my own breast."

"Yer'd be a durned fool to do that."

"It wouldn't hasten matters very much, since this

is evidently a duplicate of a message of which four others, at least, have been fired in different directions to be picked up by any chance. There are not many honest citizens abroad, probably, but it is certain that the information will be circulated, and that I am likely to be shot from ambush at any moment."

"Only a durned galoot would do that."

"If I am a spy, I deserve it."

"So ye do. But I don't swaller the suspish. Grimes is nutty, he is. If I was you, I'd git a good hoss and swipe onter ther gal, git spliced in some other town and tell the old gent to whistle."

"I shall never leave this town alive. There will be a hundred ready to shoot me within a few hours, and there is little show of escaping."

"It is givin' ye no fair shake, durn it. Ye're entitled to a trial, if it is no better than before Judge Lynch. Say, youngster, I reckymend that ye take a hoss and light out."

"And so confirm suspicion against me?"

"No use of bein' thought innocent after ye're dead. Bust it all!—git a git on ye!"

"And leave the girl I love."

"Go straight to Jesse James and tell him how ye are situated. Show him that message. If he's got the honor that ye tell about he'll give ye a chance to git outer the town, and help ye to take the gal along besides. Then, when yer air in a persish to prove that yer air all right, waltz back inter town with yer wife, ante up with the proofs and make her dad scrape his knees on the doorstep axin' yer forgiveness—that is, if he happens to be livin', which I doubt. Jesse James is goin' to shoot Noel Grimes inter shoestrings afore he leaves the town, unless I'm mistook."

"That must not be. I will stay here, if for no other purpose than to protect Noel Grimes."

"Yer durned fool!"

"He is the father of Mabel."

"Whater that? She didn't pick him out for a father. All's fair in courtin' and cussin'! Git a git on ye, I say!"

Melton Gay, like one in a dream, led the way back to the principal street.

As they passed a corner building they saw a man standing concealed in an angle, with an arrow in one hand and a slip of paper in the other.

He had picked up one of the duplicate messages. He looked up, recognized Melton Gay, and, quick as a flash, pulled a revolver.

A yell burst from the lips of Dave Wheeler.

"Don't ye shoot, cuss ye!" he cried.

Bang!

The bullet thudded in a wooden wall at the back of Melton Gay.

"Make for cover, or ye're a goner!" yelled Wheeler.

Bang!—again.

Melton fell. At the same time a scream rang from a window over the bank.

Wheeler saw a face at the window, and knew it was Mabel Grimes.

He saw her throw up the sash and step out on the broad sill. The distance to the ground was not great, and yet not many girls would have dared to make the jump.

But she did not hesitate. She caught hold of the sill with her hands, got on to her knees, and so let herself down at arm's length. Then she dropped.

By this time Wheeler had reached the side of Melton Gay, and raised him from the ground.

The bullet had grazed his temple, stunning him temporarily. He quickly opened his eyes, and would have sprung to his feet.

The man who had shot him made a leap toward them. Dave sprang up, a blaze of fury in his eyes.

Bang—bang!

Two shots from the citizen's revolver. But the lead was thrown away, though the range was short. The next moment Wheeler had him by the throat, flung him to the ground, punched him betwixt the eyes, churned him up and down, and otherwise made him wish that he had not been so prompt in obeying the command given in Grimes' message.

Mabel Grimes reached the side of Melton as the latter rose to his feet.

"Oh! you are not killed!" she cried, as she flung herself into his arms.

"You come to me, Mabel, after the charge made against me by your father!" he exclaimed.

"I know it is not true. I tried not to have him do it. But you know nothing can restrain him from acting as he believes to be best and right."

"I know. But you are not safe here. Jesse James and his men are in possession of the town. You are unsafe on the street."

"But you will be shot by the citizens as soon as this message sent out by my father gets circulated. And, besides, are you not in as much danger from the outlaws as anyone?"

"Dave Wheeler and I are at liberty on parole. We had to agree to take no hand against the bandits while they remain in possession of the town."

Wheeler had released the man who shot at Melton, but not until he had disarmed him.

At the moment three horsemen wheeled into the side street. One was Jesse James, and as he saw the citizen whom Dave had just set at liberty he coolly raised a revolver and shot him dead.

Another scream from Mabel Grimes rent the air.

"Ho, ho! petticoats!" cried Cole Younger, who had a weakness for the fairer sex in general, sometimes to the detriment of his ability as an all-around desperado.

The keen eyes of Jesse James fell upon Mabel, and

then recognized Melton Gay. He saw blood on the face of the latter and demanded:

"Who pulled a gun on you, young man?"

"The one you just shot."

"He was a citizen of your town."

"And he shot me because he was informed that I am a spy in your employ."

Dave was watching the countenance of the bandit king, hoping that the latter would speak the word which would clear the young man of the charge.

James opened his lips, then closed them grimly. Not for a minute did he speak, and then it was only to say:

"Well, he has got his medicine. Rather tough, I suppose, to leave you on parole without a gun to defend yourself with. If I was quite sure of you, I might trust you with a shooter. Who is this girl? A sweetheart of yours?"

Melton Gay hesitated.

"Yes, she is to be my wife," he answered.

"Who is she?"

"The daughter of Noel Grimes."

"Who has barricaded himself and three or four other idiots inside of that building, with an idea of keeping me out!" rasped Jesse James.

Then he turned on the girl, his fierce eyes making her shrink close to her companion.

"Why are you out here?" he demanded.

"I saw Mr. Gay fall when he was shot, and came to his aid."

"And does your old man know of it?"

"No. I was upstairs in the same building."

"You have good nerve—take after him, I suppose. Now, you might as well stick by the young fellow, for there'll be no quarter for Noel Grimes, whether his dukes are up or down. And—but I want you to come with me, miss."

"What is wanted?" demanded Gay.

"Don't worry yourself, youngster—I won't elope with your sweetheart. But she has got to answer a question or two, or it may go hard with her. Come, girl."

The outlaw chief leaned down from his saddle and seized her by the arm.

"He will not allow harm or insult to come to you, Mabel," said Melton, reassuringly.

With that she allowed the bandit to lead her away to a little distance. Then he paused, and she once more felt his fiercely-searching eyes on her face.

"Miss Grimes," he said, his tone respectful in spite of its sternness. "You mailed a letter this morning directed to the sheriff of this county. You remember about it?"

"I remember mailing a letter," she answered.

"You know who it was for?"

"I noticed the name on the envelope, but I didn't know that it was the county sheriff."

"You deny having anything to do with writing the letter?"

"Certainly I did not write it."

"Who did?"

"It was given me to mail by my father. But I don't think he wrote it. The address was not written by him, I am sure."

"I asked you who did write the letter, not who didn't. Stick to the point."

"I don't know who wrote it."

"Nonsense, miss! Probably you are not lying, but I shot a woman once, about two months ago, for trying the same trick you are trying to deceive me. Women don't like to tell a square lie that can be nailed to them, because they're afraid to do it. But they manage to get along with telling as little of the truth as they can, and that is mighty little. It won't do, miss. Who do you think wrote the letter?"

Mabel Grimes did take after her father in the matter of nerve. The terrible eyes of Jesse James, the bandit king, were looking into her very soul, she knew that.

His terrible threat was hanging over her, but she raised her eyes bravely to his face.

"I have told you all I know. You may shoot me if you like to boast of shooting women!" she said.

His face did not change. If he admired her nerve, he did not show it.

"Do you mean to say, miss, that you don't even have a suspicion of who wrote the letter I am inquiring about?"

"I have no reason to suspect one more than another of the three clerks employed in the bank. If the handwriting had been his, of course I should have thought my father wrote the letter. But he did not address it, and the penmanship was not familiar to me. I really think it was handed to him by someone who came into the bank just after the doors were opened."

"I think so myself," admitted the outlaw, and the words sounded as if he were speaking to himself.

"It is hard to get at a cursed spy—but I will know the truth in this case, if I have to roast every man in the town over a slow fire to get the truth out of him. How about that lover of yours, Melton Gay?"

"I know it was not written by him."

"If you want to marry the fellow, and there is any kind of a priest or minister in the place, better get the knot tied, and then get out of town. I will give you passports. He isn't safe here. And there will be a grand blow-up before I go. That is all, girl."

"I know that his friends are foes, while his foes seem to have become his friends," said Mabel Grimes, as she returned to Melton Gay.

CHAPTER VII.

SHOT ON THE WING.

It was afternoon.

There was not a public place in the town which was not completely in possession of Jesse James and his men, with the exception of the bank.

As yet no attack had been made on this institution.

One of the outlaws had ventured to send a bullet through a window, but Frank James, who was near at the moment, said sharply:

"No more of that, Shep."

"What's the matter with makin' the richest part of the haul afore a crowd gits together to make a fight?" demanded the bandit who had fired the shot.

"Jess orders the doings in this town, and it is his say that goes. There won't any crowd get together while Jess is mayor and his gang make up the city council and police."

The stage driver got in a little late. In accordance with the orders of the outlaw leader, the stage had been held up in the pass where it entered the valley in which the town was built.

There were several passengers, some express of value, and the mail pouch.

The passengers had to give up their money and watches after the usual style dictated by the road-agent of earlier days. But this was not the real part of the game; Jesse James did not order, but merely permitted it, allowing his men who played it to hold the booty. The real object was that the stage-driver should give up his weapons for defense, and one of the bandits take a place beside him on the box.

The mail was not to be meddled with.

Jesse James had ordered that no mail, express or individuals should be allowed to enter or to leave the town except by his leave.

The stage-driver would have made resistance had he dared, but the name of Jesse James was enough to make him understand that obedience to the letter was the only chance for life.

After the mail was delivered at the postoffice the bandit chief looked it over as he had done that which was to go out. He would not allow the postmaster to touch it until he had first assorted it.

He had a pouch made up immediately to go out. One of his own men took the place of the regular stage-driver.

The latter ventured to expostulate.

He trembled in his boots after he had done so, however, for he expected his punishment would come in the shape of a bullet.

But Jesse James dealt out surprises of more than one kind. While his fierce eyes met the shrinking gaze of the stage-driver, he demanded:

"You carry the mail for the government under a contract, don't you?"

"Why—why, sure."

"And you are under bonds to deliver the pouch in good order at both ends of your route?"

"Yes."

"Well, if you go on the box and fail to report that the pouch has been tampered with, and that the one to come back will be, then you will forfeit your bond. If you can't go at all, you won't be held responsible. I'm shouldering this business, and the thing for you to do is to keep out of it, or you will be accused of acting as a secret member of my gang. See the point?"

"You bet!"

"That's all, then."

This occurred a short time after the finding of the warning message, of which several duplicates were shot out from the top of the bank building by order of Grimes, the cashier.

Having seen that no warning of the condition of affairs could leak out of the town by means of the mail or stage, the bandit king made ready to attack the bank.

Mounted on his horse, he rode entirely around the building.

As he was returning to the main street he saw what appeared to be a dove or pigeon fly from a window at the top of the building.

He saw the bird rise almost directly upward after flying clear of the building.

Jesse James' eagle eyes took note of the peculiar behavior of the pigeon, and his mind instantly suspected the cause.

Up went his Winchester.

Crack!

The pigeon came fluttering to the ground.

It was dead when it alighted, and Jesse James reached the spot where it fell almost as soon as it touched the ground.

He picked up the bird, and in a flash he had detached a closely folded message which had been tied to one of its legs, and almost entirely concealed by the feathers.

It was directed to the sheriff of the county, and briefly stated the fact that Jesse James and his gang had attacked the town, and were in possession of it, only the bank having failed to surrender.

The message was signed by Noel Grimes, and following his name were the letters: S. S. D.

"Secret Service Detective, eh!" muttered the chief of outlaws.

"And that explains why he has been so sharp and so nervy as to give me more trouble than I usually meet! Quite a scheme, for an officer to come here and go into a line of business that would be sure to attract the gentry of my cloth, just for the chance of beating us! And the sending out of a message in this way is rather good, too—if it had only worked."

Wheeling again, intending to give orders to his

brother, Jesse James found Sodger Jim slinking toward the rear of a building near at hand.

"Come here," ordered the outlaw.

"Yas, I was ercomin'," said the pilgrim, hastily pointing his toes toward James.

"It looked more as if you were trying to sneak out of my sight. Where were you going?"

"I—I was er-goin' to Bill Williams', to git something ter take the sorter gorn feelin' outer my stomach."

"Liar!—take that!"

Jesse James leaned suddenly from his saddle and hit the bum with the butt of his revolver, sending him reeling across the street.

The pilgrim fell full length, and for a moment he wobbled clumsily on the ground. Then he got up, whimpering like a boy who has been thrashed.

"You agreed to spy for me and to tell me only the truth. You said you would belong to me as long as I might need the services of a sneak. Now I find you up to something that you were going to lie to me about. I might as well blow out your brains, and buy up somebody that has more in his head."

"Oh, Lawd!—don't—don't! I'll own up! Give me one more show, Mister James!"

"Where were you going, then?"

"To—to ther bank!"

"To the bank? How did you expect to get in? And what business have you there?"

"I goter a message from my friend—I mean, from Mr. Grimes."

"How did you get it?"

"It drapped right at my feet as I was passin' cluss to the buldin'."

"Let me see it."

Sodger Jim was white as a sheet. He pulled a scrap of paper out from among the rags which he wore.

"It says that I'll be a dead man if I shows it to ary soul in the univarse!" he whined, as he handed it to Jesse James.

The latter read it at a glance.

It briefly directed Sodger Jim to go into the house which stood nearest the bank, descend the cellar stairs and by means of a passage go from there into the basement of the bank building.

When the latter was built a store had been opened in the rooms since occupied by the bank. The proprietor lived in the house alluded to. A shallow cellar or basement had been dug at the same time for both house and store, and a passage for communication between them left open.

There was a door between, and since the banking rooms were opened this door had been nailed up.

Few knew even of its existence.

Probably Grimes had waited in vain for some one to approach with whom he might communicate in

this way, and the mission which he wished Sodger Jim to perform will be explained later.

The concluding line of the brief message was this:

"If the citizen into whose hands this message is sent shows it to any other living soul, his life will be forfeited as a traitor!"

The message was unsigned, but the handwriting was that of Noel Grimes.

"Another from this secret service man!" muttered Jesse James.

"I beg parding, but I didn't understand yer last remark," drawled Sodger Jim.

"That doesn't matter, I allow, if you understand the clip I gave you just now."

"Lawd, but I ain't er-blamin' of yer, Mister James. I air so absent-minded that it takes a rap now and then ter keep my wits erbout me."

"You will get something heavier than that if I catch you playing the traitor again. You were going to obey this order from Grimes, when you knew that you had sold yourself to me. Now, if I turn my back on you, you will play the sneak again."

"I sw'ar, solemn as a parson, that I won't do nothin' er the kind."

"Your oath is nothing. It isn't worth the wind you blow out in uttering it. Fear is the only thing that will count with a coward. Now, look you here, Sodger Jim!"

"Yas, I'm er-lookin'."

"The next sign of treachery that I see in you will send a bullet through your worthless head, and I won't stop to ask a question. You will find that my word is good, if yours is worthless."

"Lawd, Mister James—"

"Enough. Stick close to me now until I say you may go. And keep your mouth shut, except when I ask you to open it."

Sodger Jim bowed his head in humility, and as the king of outlaws rode slowly along the street the pilgrim slunk over the same way at the side of the horse.

Jesse James took care that neither of them should come within range of any of the windows of the bank, for fear that one of those on the lookout within should catch a glimpse of them.

He did some reconnoitering at a little distance, and at the same time he was deciding upon a course which, at first, seemed like a doubtful one to pursue.

The clinching reason for accepting his own mental suggestion was uttered aloud:

"It can do no harm, even if he weakens and betrays the truth. He knows nothing of my plans. If it succeeds it may help me; if it fails, it will neither help Grimes nor injure me. It is a go. That fox of a secret service man will find that he has run up against it."

"What did ye say, Mister James?" drawled Sodger Jim.

The outlaw king turned upon the bum, and the lat-

ter trembled under the fierce eyes which, it seemed to him, were capable of reading his most secret thoughts.

"Do you suppose that that bank, with only Grimes and two or three assistants, can hold out against me and my men when I get ready to order him to open the doors?"

"I reckon they kaint, Mister James."

"Do you reckon I'll show any quarter to them when they come to throw up the sponge?"

"I reckon not."

"You are reckoning about right, Sodger Jim. Now, I'm going to let you do what Grimes just asked you to do in the message you picked up. You will stay long enough to find what he wants of you, and also just how many men he has inside to help him fight. Then you will come back and report to me."

"Oh, Lawd! Grimes'll lam me!"

"Let him lam!"

"He mayn't let me out."

"You'll have to manage to get out."

"What if I kaint?"

"You'll die with the rest of them inside."

"Oh, Lawd!"

"Now get a move on you."

"How—how soon ye expect me to come back and report?"

"In an hour, at the outside; in half that time if possible."

"Lawd!"

The pilgrim slunk away.

A good many schemes for satisfying the demands of Jesse James without risking his precious life flitted through the none too brilliant brain of Sodger Jim.

But he rejected them all. He knew he could not fool the man who seemed to look into his cowardly heart. At the same time, he dreaded to try to hoodwink Grimes.

But there was no help for it. He sneaked into the house, as Grimes had requested.

In less than an hour he came back to Jesse James, quaking in soul as well as in body.

The outlaw king covered him with his revolver, and said:

"Now for your yarn. Mind and keep it straight!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ATTACK ON THE BANK.

Sodger Jim had done well for his master—that is, for the bandit king.

But it had been a tough job.

He had found Noel Grimes almost as hard to face, and to lie to, as he had Jesse James.

Grimes had questioned him like an attorney, and he had been careless with a pistol under the pilgrim's nose. He had threatened Jim direfully.

But he had not found it hard to get out. Grimes

was ready to have him go, but there was something he expected him to do, and there were some hard ways of dying in store for Sodger Jim if he failed to fulfill the commission with which he was charged.

The report was that there were three men with Grimes in the bank. They were armed to the teeth, and appeared recklessly indifferent to the death which it appeared they were certain to meet.

For that Jesse James would show mercy to any who gave him extra trouble was hardly to be expected.

Jesse consulted with his brother Frank, to whom he for the first time confided the discoveries he had made in regard to Grimes.

"Well, he is a fox, isn't he!" exclaimed the older brother.

"He probably came to the town with the idea of cleaning out the robbers and outlaws who are dead-sure to gather in a new place in this part of the country. He may not have thought there would be a chance to meet you and me, and on the other hand, we may be the very ones he was looking for, only we got here before he expected us. You know when we were last heard from it was in Missouri."

"He didn't count on seeing us quite so early, I reckon," was Frank's comment.

"Another point: he has three men with him. It don't take four men to do the business of a new bank in a place of this size. That means that they are deputies masquerading."

"Do you believe it?"

"There isn't a doubt. Ordinary bank clerks would have scuttled out of there as soon as they heard that we had struck the town, and pleaded with us to take charge of their guns. They cave easy. Grimes has shot one man who tried to hold him up, and he made no fuss about it. His clerks are made of the same stuff. That is why I have been a little slow about cleaning out the bank."

"But she gets cleaned out just the same."

"Yes, and before another sunrise. You know we planned to sojourn here a couple of days, and to run things to suit ourselves while we were here, just for the novelty of the thing."

"The citizens didn't put up enough of a fight to make it lively."

"Wait till we get into a shooting match with that Grimes. He has three men with him, and I've made up my mind that every man of them is a deputy under the county sheriff, specially appointed, and trained in the business. No ordinary bank clerks would undertake to back up Grimes against you and me and our crowd."

"Looks like it. But when do we begin the game?"

"In a little more than an hour it will be dark. That is our time. A half-dozen of us go in and take possession, while others are shooting at the windows from the outside."

"Go in and take possession, eh! How?"

"By way of the passage that Sodger Jim got in and out."

"Correct! Jess, it will be a hot minute when we get in. Grimes will die game!"

"I don't want to shoot the man if he can be taken alive."

"Thunder! It will be tough to get him that way."

"He is worth more to me live-weight, instead of killed and dressed. But we've no time to lose. There's a chance of some smart Jimmy in the town thinking he can drive a crowd against us, and hustle us over the borders. There is only one way to keep them down."

"Shoot every cuss of a citizen that ventures out of doors."

"Yes. Don't shoot women unless they act suspicious. But if you catch any of them prowling around pull 'em in and we'll find what they're up to. Terror will keep the town quiet while we tarry here."

They separated.

Jesse James gave orders to several of his men to keep up a scattered shooting at the windows of the bank.

This would hold the attention of the inmates, and prevent them from taking any risks. It would prevent any communication with the citizens outside.

Jesse kept Sodger Jim close to his side, fearing that he might sneak into the building and warn Grimes of the plans to capture the bank.

In this enterprise Jesse James had the largest gang of men employed that he had called together for a long while.

The prospects were in favor of a fair haul in the way of treasure, as they did not intend to leave much in the town that they cared to take away.

At the same time, Jesse knew that there were officers in that part of the country who had boasted that the James boys could not scoop everything out that way after their style farther east, in Kansas and Missouri.

They meant to show that all parts of the country were the same to them, when it came to working a clean-out.

Meanwhile, Melton Gay, Dave Wheeler and Mabel Grimes had beaten a retreat to the eastern end of the town, where the girl was left with a family where her family had boarded when they first came to the place.

Gay had resolved not to accept the proffered passports from Jesse James for leaving the town.

He knew that to have done so would have clinched the suspicion of his being a spy in the employ of the bandits.

Besides, Mabel did not wish to leave the town until the fate of her father had been decided.

Neither did she wish now to be under obligations to Jesse James, the outlaw.

"Pair of cussed fools!" was the comment growled

out by Dave Wheeler, when he and Gay once more entered one of the streets in the vicinity of the bank.

"You and I have guns with us, anyhow," said Gay.

"Blessed little good they'll do us with lead in our hearts."

"We may weather the storm, and leave the town with colors flying when the battle is over."

"What good is a gun if ye kaint use it? We're under parole not to vamoose without permish from Jesse; nyther can we shoot Jesse or his men; nyther can we shoot anybody belongin' in the town, 'thout bein' spected of bein' in league with Jesse. We're nyther hosses ner steers, and we don't carry ther brand of nyther one ranch ner another, and any durned g'loot kin rustle us that takes a notion."

Melton Gay laughed.

The quaint philosophy of his partner could not depress his spirits then. Mabel Grimes had testified unmistakably to the strength of her love for him, and that made all else in the world seem bright.

He felt as though he were proof against the bullets of citizen or outlaw.

A young man in love doesn't fear bullets.

But Dave Wheeler did not feel that way.

They had, indeed, obtained revolvers, which they had concealed carefully about their persons.

They well knew that Jesse James would have them disarmed again if he knew it. But the bandit chief doubtless expected them to prepare themselves against the suspicious citizens, at least, for that would be no breach of parole.

"Noel Grimes must be saved, if any hazard will do it," said Gay.

"What kin we do without breakin' our parole? You're so durned squeamish erbout honor toward thet cuss of a bandit, that ud shoot us inter whiplashes jest ter amuse hisself, ef he happined to feel thet way."

"Honor is honor, and Jesse James respects it when he finds it. He has seen so little of the real article, though, that he doubts about its existence."

"Yah!" snarled the old ranchman, with one of his sidelong looks at the face of his friend.

He wanted to say something which the other would have little liked to hear.

Dave could not help a suspicion against the young fellow when the latter kept referring to Jesse James in such complimentary terms.

He felt that there must be a good reason for it, and if that reason was a secret alliance with the outlaw chief, then Wheeler would not have scrupled to obey the order circulated by Grimes.

"I'd shoot a durned spy, ef he was my brother!" was his thought. And from that moment he began to watch Melton Gay sharper than he had ever done before, and with a real suspicion that endangered the young man more than the latter even dreamed.

The sun had set beyond the mountains.

A brief twilight flush lingered on the landscape, and while it lasted it became strangely still in the beleaguered town.

Not a citizen ventured to stir abroad.

There was not one of the half-dozen streets which was not patrolled by one of the outlaws, who acted as a policeman of the most deadly sort.

It was not their purpose to arrest and lock up anyone seen making suspicious movements. Their orders were to shoot, and to shoot to kill.

Wheeler and Gay met one of these, but Dave noticed that the bandit seemed to recognize his companion with a faint, significant look.

Darkness fell swiftly.

Then Jesse and Frank James, accompanied by Hank Starr and two others, entered the secret passage from the dwelling to the bank.

Crack—crack—crack! sounded from within!

CHAPTER IX.

LAYING THE MINE.

Sodger Jim, quaking with a terror too great for words, had been left at the door of the dwelling, by which entrance to the bank was to be gained.

One of the outlaws was left with him. The bum wished in his heart that he had a pistol with a live cartridge in it.

He might then have been tempted to shoot the bandit at his side and make a wild break for liberty—such a break as only a coward may make in his desperation.

But he had proved that the revolver was empty. His case was hopeless.

"Oh, Lawd!" he breathed, as he heard the first shots inside, indicating that the terrible foes had met.

In reality, it was not so bad as he thought.

Noel Grimes and Jesse James were not yet face to face.

There proved to be some one on the inside of the door to the passage on guard.

When Jesse James, who led the way, attempted to open the door, there was a sharp report from the other side of it, and a bullet splintered a panel and, it would seem, ought to have entered the heart of the bandit king, who was exactly in range.

But Jesse James only staggered. He stepped to one side, however, and the next moment a kick was delivered that shivered the lower part of the door.

"Down with it, and shoot the devil on the other side!" yelled the leader.

A rush was made. The door fell, crushing as if it had been made of paper.

Bang!—from the nervy guard on the other side of it.

One of the bandits went down with a groan. Then the revolver of Jesse spoke its terrible word. The

guard fell and clutched at the dirt floor in a silent death spasm.

Then the rush was made, for the way into the bank seemed to be clear.

The basement of the bank building was dimly lighted with an oil lamp on a bracket.

The James boys reached the foot of the stairs together and dashed up them side by side. Two of their comrades followed.

But at the head of the stairs there was another door, and, like the first, it was securely fastened.

This was not all.

It was a heavier door than the other, and when Jesse James flung himself against it, it did not show the slightest sign of yielding.

A fierce oath burst from the lips of the younger brother, and it was echoed by the elder.

"Barricaded!" hissed Jesse.

Bang!—from the other side.

A Winchester bullet cut through, and this time a low ejaculation of rage and pain broke from the lips of Frank James.

He staggered backward, and but for the quick aid of his brother, would have fallen to the foot of the stairs.

"Much hurt?" questioned Jesse, with his lips close to Frank's ear.

"I think not—but curse the luck! I'm bleeding like a butchered calf!"

"Shot for shot!" hissed Jesse. And his own Winchester passed a shot through one of the heavy panels.

There was no sound from the other side to tell whether or not the shot was in any way effective.

Frank was assisted to the foot of the stairs, and at the same time the other outlaws poured a volley from their Winchesters at the door.

The panels were fairly riddled with bullets, but from the other side there was no response of any kind.

"No more waste of lead on a door," ordered Jesse James.

A hasty examination of Frank's wound discovered it to be comparatively insignificant. It was a scratch over the ribs under his left arm. It did not even crack a bone, and the blood that flowed was doubtless some of the worst in his body—and all of his blood was bad enough, as his foes had long ago found out.

There is something about the effect of a bullet wound that seems to weaken a man all out of proportion to the apparent importance of the hurt.

It was so with Frank James. He had to sit down on the lowest stair, while Jesse stanching the flow of blood and stuck on a strip of plaster with styptic cotton, which he always carried with him for use on himself or a comrade, in case of need.

The other outlaws also retreated to the foot of the

stairs, for there was a possibility of shots being fired from the other side, which they were not now allowed to return.

Frank James soon braced himself to rise to his feet.

Outside, there had been a steady fusillade from the outlaws posted in the street, and who had been ordered to shoot at the windows of the bank.

The fire was ineffective, except to the extent of not leaving an unbroken pane of glass in any of the windows on that side of the building.

Although the bandits were not informed on that point, the upper rooms of the building were occupied as a tenement by two different families.

There were no children, but there were two women and their husbands, and the latter, cooped up by the relentless power wielded by the outlaws, were ready enough to go down and assist the cashier and clerks in their defense of the bank.

They had not been called upon to do so until shortly before the attack had been made at the basement of the building.

Hence the bandits had two more foes to contend with than they had counted on when planning the attack.

"We have made a slick scoop in this town up to the point of striking Grimes and his institution," said Jesse, when his brother indicated that he was ready to shoulder his part of the load again. "But here we seem to have run up against something that we didn't count on. But the house has got to fall just the same, and it is merely a matter of using bigger guns to smash the fort."

"You seem to be talking riddles, Jess," said Frank.

"Let us get out of here and I'll show you how we'll solve them. But stay. I want two of you to remain on guard here, and so make sure that the game doesn't slip through our fingers at the last moment. Grimes has got to cave. I would rather get hold of him alive than to have him pass out all the treasure in the bank vault on condition that he should go free."

Frank sent a quick, keen glance into the face of his brother. The reason of it was that he did not often hear Jesse speak in that tone.

It indicated the making of a terrible resolve—one that boded ill to the foe who should stand in the way of the accomplishment of any of his designs.

Younger and Starr were left to guard the basement, with orders to kill any man who should attempt to pass through.

The outlaws surrounding the bank were directed to continue occasional firing at the windows of the building, to keep the inmates occupied.

On the way to the postoffice and general store, Jesse for the first time broke the silence.

"I'm going to wake up this sleepy young town, while I put a few of its pig-headed citizens to sleep, Frank."

"I reckoned you were simmering something, Jess."

"I'm going to take what blasting powder or dynamite they happen to have in the store. If they haven't either, two casks of gunpowder will do."

"And blow up the bank?"

"Yes."

"A good idea. But if the citizens have any nerve, that will stir them to make a desperate effort to rustle us out of the town."

"Let them rustle. We'll be through here by that time anyhow. But the quicker it is done, the better. That Grimes is a fox that will make a run to some other hole if he has an hour's notice."

"Won't you give him a chance to surrender without the blow-up?"

"I will give him five minutes to do it in—that's all."

"There are women in the building, I reckon."

"Five minutes will allow them to get out. That is all the time I'll give anybody under the roof."

They were quite near the postoffice when the outlaw chief spoke these words.

As yet the new town had few street lights, and the shadows were long and black in that locality.

Sheltered by those shadows were the forms of Dave Wheeler and Melton Gay, and to their ears came distinctly every word of the terrible threat of the bandit king.

In a moment the outlaw brothers were beyond earshot, and then the hand of Melton Gay gripped the arm of his companion.

"You heard?" he questioned.

"I heered," echoed the old ranchman.

"Noel Grimes must be saved—he must have more than a five-minute warning."

"Jest as you say, youngster, if ye can make a go of it."

"It must be done, no matter what the hazard."

"Forgot yer parole pledge, I reckon."

"This has nothing to do with that. It is the saving of a brave man from being mercilessly murdered."

"Do ye reckon that Jesse James will take interference kindly from you and me?"

"What matters it how he will take it? It is life or death to the father of the woman I love."

"All right—go ahead, then. Only it might be that some little diffikilities will turn up when it comes to doin' the warnin' ack. They've left men on guard, it's likely, and there are more stationed outside nigh enough together to make it diffikilt to signal in any way. There's on'y one idea that pops inter my head that's at all promisin'."

"What is it?"

"Shootin' of his highness, Jess James the next time he shows his ugly mug. Air ye a fair shot?"

Gay was silent. There was a great struggle in his heart. Noel Grimes had been little of a friend to him; yet he regarded the man as an example of courage and integrity, whatever mistakes he might make.

"You mean, that we must shoot from ambush?"

"If ye think ye can draw and snap quicker than he can, step out and face him and tell him what ter do with his dukes. But I reckon that wouldn't be the surest way to keep Grimes from bein' blowed into kingdom come!"

Melton Gay had a terrible alternative to choose.

CHAPTER X.

THE ACTION OF GRIMES.

To the credit of Melton Gay be it said that the danger to his own life did not enter into the mental argument which would decide his course of action.

He shrunk from the thought of even attempting to take the life of Jesse James.

His own life had been saved by the bandit king, and only a few hours had elapsed since the event.

Besides, he was under a pledge to make no hostile move against the outlaws, and to take no part in opposition to their purposes.

To act on the suggestion of his companion would be to commit an act of treachery and a breach of his own honor at the same time.

It would be in a lawful cause, it is true, and in the eyes of most men he would doubtless be justified by the end sought.

This was not all.

Even a shot from ambush might not kill the outlaw chief.

Jesse James had been shot at in that way more than once, and yet he lived.

On the other hand, to boldly confront him and order him to throw up his hands would be an almost hopeless proceeding.

"It seems impossible!" groaned Gay.

"Rather slim prospect, I reckon. But I ain't invitin' it. Let Grimes take care of himself. Jesse is goin' to give him a chance to surrender, and that will give him a show for his life, it is possible."

"Slight chance, I fear. But if he could be warned now, there would be a hope of his own wit showing him a way. Ah!—here comes Sodger Jim, slinking after Jesse James. He must be compelled to convey the warning!"

"Good enough!" grunted Wheeler.

The powerful hand of Dave gripped the arm of the pilgrim and jerked him in among the deeper shadows.

At the same time Jim felt the muzzle of a revolver against his temple, and that kept him from letting out the howl of terror that rose to his lips.

"Don't ye let out a whimper, Sodger!" whispered Dave.

"Lawd!" breathed Jim.

"They're goin' to blow up the bank. Grimes and the others inside of it will git h'isted at the same blow, unless they're warned. You've got to warn 'em. You're the lackey of Jesse James, and you've got to

tell any of his men that tries to stop ye that ye're sent by Jess with a message to Grimes. D'ye git the idee?"

"Oh, Lawd!—I kaint!"

"Jest as I told ye, Gay," said Dave. "And I'll have to shoot the cuss now, so't he won't betray us to the bandits."

"Lawd—Lawd! I won't, I won't!" chattered Jim.

"I'm goin' to shoot ye!"

"I'll kerry the message—I'll kerry the message!"

"Sure?"

"Yas, yas—to save my friend Grimes!"

Melton Gay was writing it while Dave was intimidating the messenger. Scrawled in the dark, it was nevertheless as plain a message as need have been written.

It was given to Sodger Jim, and he hid it among his rags. But he was quaking as he never quaked before.

He expected Jesse James to appear before him at any moment, and he was morally certain that the outlaw would demand to know of everything that had passed since they separated. He was equally certain that he would not be able to keep back a word of the truth.

Yet it was true that he did not want to know that he might save the life of Grimes and refused to try.

He realized that an important mission had been intrusted to him, and he suddenly felt a sense of the importance of it.

He did not love Jesse James. The latter had knocked him down two or three times, and treated him like a dog all the time.

"Lawd!—but I hate the cuss!" was his thought.

"Get a wiggle on ye!" growled Wheeler.

Sodger Jim started off, and he moved almost as fast as he could have done had Jesse James been there to prod him with the muzzle of a revolver.

He met several of the outlaws, but he seemed to be on such urgent business that none of them attempted to detain him. Indeed, they thought he was doing an errand of some sort for their leader.

"See Sodger Jim waggle his pins!" was the comment of one.

"Goin' to see his gal, I reckon," said another.

"Maybe he has drawn a pension."

"Amble along, Sodger!"

Such were the cries and remarks that followed him as he made his way toward the dwelling next to the bank.

At the door he was met by Hank Starr.

"What's the word, Sodger?" growled Starr.

"I goter go up and see Grimes."

"I reckon not, Sodger."

"I goter. Jesse James sent me, speshul."

"Got a message?"

"Yas."

"Show it."

"Durn it!—it ain't writ out. It's in my head."

"Then tell it."

"Lawd!—he'd kill me! Let me along, or I dunno what'll be to pay."

Sometimes half-wit serves better than keen wit. It was so in this case. Starr was deceived by the air of earnestness on the part of Sodger Jim, and he did not give the latter credit for wit enough to dissemble.

"Go along, then. But I reckon you won't come it over Grimes, just the same."

He got to the door where Frank James had been shot. Here he paused to listen, and then knocked.

He heard a slight movement on the other side. Then he put his lips to the crack and mumbled:

"It's me—Sodger Jim! I've got a message for ye. Save yer lives, I reckon."

The door opened and the muzzle of something stared Sodger Jim in the eye.

"Come," said a voice.

Jim advanced, and the muzzle backed away as he went through the door. It did not cease to stare at him until the door was closed behind him.

It was Grimes himself who confronted the bum in the dim light, and to the eyes of Jim his glance was almost as terrible as that of Jesse James.

Noel Grimes was a short, stocky man, with the air of possessing great reserve strength of muscle as well as force of will.

A hard man to run up against, would have been the verdict of any reader of character.

"Trot out the message, Jim," ordered Grimes.

"Yere it is."

Grimes read it slowly, and his eye had a queer flash in it as he noticed the signature of Melton Gay.

"Who gave you this?" he demanded.

"Mr. Gay. Dave Wheeler was with him."

"Who else?"

"Nobody."

"Don't lie to me about this, Sodger Jim, as you have done about some other things. Don't think that I am ignorant of your being pledged to Jesse James as well as to me. I know that you came in here as a spy the last time you showed up."

"Lawd!—but how could I help it? He hild a gun to my head jest as you are doin', and he would have blowed me inter scraps if I had refused to do what he asked of me. Ye know what a reputation Jesse James has got, Mr. Grimes. He don't keer how many men he kills."

"Neither do I, if they prove treacherous. I'm not letting you live now because I feel a sense of pity for you, or because I'm naturally merciful. I need you, that is all. He would have killed you when you had served him enough. Now, you will have to stay with me until the end of this affair, for you would blow on the whole business that has come to your knowledge just as soon as he got his eyes on you. About this message, you must tell me the exact truth. You

must tell me what you suspect, as well as what you know. Do you believe that Melton Gay sent me this message because Jesse James ordered it, or on his own responsibility? You are not a fool, though you are such a blamed coward that one might think so."

"I don't reckon that Jess James knows anything about this message bein' sent to ye."

"You really think Gay sent it for my benefit?"

"Yas."

"Well, then, I may have been mistaken about the fellow. Time will tell. It seems that he hasn't been shot, as I directed, and that seems to prove that he has been protected by the outlaws, who have had full swing in the town."

Grimes made the door doubly secure, and then forced Sodger Jim to go up ahead of him into the banking-rooms.

These looked like the inside of an arsenal, rather than a bank.

There were more than a score of Winchesters, as many revolvers and other small weapons. All the articles of furniture had been piled in front of the windows, to guard against the bullets which frequently slipped in through the shattered panes.

One man, wounded, reclined on a settee. Three others were sitting near, guns ready, faces fearless and grim.

"We have got to get out of here, or die the death of rats in a trap!" was Grimes' announcement.

CHAPTER XI.

A REIGN OF TERROR IN THE NEW TOWN.

The time occupied in the writing of the warning message by Melton Gay, and its delivery to Grimes by Sodger Jim, was really brief.

Jesse James, meanwhile, met with more difficulty in procuring the powder which he wished to use in blowing up the bank than he anticipated.

The stock of ammunition at the store where the postoffice was kept had run low. It had been the intention of the proprietor to replenish within a day or two.

But there was another store in the town that usually had a larger trade in powder, and which, therefore, was better supplied. To this Jesse James was obliged to go to obtain what he required.

Then a team had to be found to cart the kegs to the vicinity of the house through the basement of which access to the bank was gained.

It was near midnight before these arrangements were completed.

Just as the wagon with the kegs of powder started from the store, a horseman dashed up the street and halted at the side of Jesse James.

It was one of the men whom he had left in the street near the bank. He was intensely agitated, and it was a moment before he could speak.

"Come, Jake, what sticks in your throat?" demanded the bandit king, harshly.

"I—I reckon that devil has given us the slip, somehow!"

"Which devil, curse you?"

"Grimes, in the bank!"

"How can that be? Who has been playing the traitor again? By Heaven! I will have every traitor flayed alive, as fast as I catch them, from this hour!"

"I don't know how it could happen. We have done as you ordered in everything."

"It depended on the guards I left at the door. But they could not have been false. No, it had to come by a warning from some one—if he has really escaped, which I doubt. And in any case, he can't get clear of the town, unless he has wings."

"He is out of the building, I'm pretty sure of that."

"Come—we will soon know."

Jesse James put spurs to his horse, and his brother, who was at his side at the moment, followed suit.

They were soon at the entrance of the basement, where the guards had been left.

There they found Hank Starr and his companion lying on the dirt floor, one—the former—groaning dismally, while the other seemed to be dead.

Frank James rolled Starr roughly over on his back; at the same time Jesse made a mad dash for the inner doors, up the stairs, and into the empty banking-rooms.

A glance was sufficient to convince him that it would be useless to look further in the hope of finding either Grimes or any of his companions.

"He isn't the sort to hide under a barrel, or stick his head into a dark place, with the idea that he was safe," exclaimed the bandit king.

The fierceness of the man's face, and the intensity of his tones, would have been appalling could they have been observed by one of his enemies.

He thought of the women, who, it was possible, were at that moment crouching in terror in the upper rooms.

But he knew that they could tell him nothing of what he wished to know.

"And it isn't in my line of business to scare for the sport of seeing helpless people tremble," he growled.

Yet the king of bandits little suspected that those same women had been assured by Noel Grimes that they would not be molested by Jesse James were they left in the house alone.

Indeed, Grimes well knew that the women would be safer alone than with his companions and himself under the same roof, since he was the chief object of the outlaw's malice.

Jesse did not tarry sixty seconds in the building.

Returning to his companions, he found that Frank had succeeded in reviving Hank Starr. The compan-

ion of the latter was still unconscious, although it was evident that he was not seriously injured.

Frank was trying to get a coherent account from Starr. But the latter seemed to be bewildered by the blow which he had received on the head.

Jesse pounced on him like a hawk.

He poured whisky into him, rubbed his hands and legs as he would have done in case of freezing, and so speedily restored the faulty circulation. The outlaw was revived by a tingle from head to feet.

"Now, how was it? How did that devil get by you?" demanded Jesse James.

"Easy," growled Starr. "There were five of them, and they come at us with clubbed guns. They might have shot us just as easy; but they didn't, and pounded our heads with iron instead."

"And what were you doing all the while?"

"I'll own up, Jess, that we was off guard for the minute, not thinkin' that there was the shadow of a show for Grimes and his crew trying to get by us."

"That isn't the whole story. They wouldn't have tried the trick if they hadn't been warned. There has been treachery. Frank—go out and order a roundup of the fugitives! If they are allowed to slip out of town, I'll never rest till I have nailed the treachery and the carelessness where they belong, and made the responsible ones pay the dearest price for it that flesh and blood can be made to pay."

The words were no more than out of the mouth of Jesse James before the order was being obeyed by Frank.

The latter rushed out on to the street of the town like a cyclone. The word passed from man to man, and so from one end of the place to the other in an incredibly brief space of time.

There was a flash, flash! and bang, bang! of guns at widely-scattered points.

From door to door rushed the outlaw-police, demanding admittance where there were locks turned against them, and entering without permission where there were none. More than one sharp report sealed the doom of a citizen who resisted such intrusion. More than one man of good courage pleaded for his life, and told all the truth he knew to keep the deadly lead out of his brain.

It was the beginning of a brief and terrible reign of terror in the new town—a deeper terror than had been inspired by the first advent of the outlaws, twelve hours before.

The warning reached the bandits who guarded the only ways of exit from the place, and they became doubly alert.

They were ordered to allow no person to pass out until either Jesse or Frank James appeared in person to give the word. This was to guard against the use of any kind of a ruse.

Meanwhile Jesse, the bandit chief, pumped the truth from the lips of Hank Starr.

The outlaw guard felt that he had been less careful than he should have been, and therefore he was reluctant to tell of his admitting Sodger Jim with the message, which Jesse James had not a doubt of having been the means of warning Grimes of the intended blowing up the bank.

Starr half-expected his leader to kill him in his wrath. But, as a matter of fact, Jesse James realized that either Frank or he might have done the same thing under like conditions, and he was not inclined to hold Starr responsible.

Neither was his anger directed against Sodger Jim.

"I should have known better than to expect him to be faithful, and I didn't expect it," was his thought. "But he did not really give the warning, for I don't believe he knew what I intended to do. He was put up to it by somebody else. That infernal traitor of a spy—the one I had here to prepare the way for me—the one I have trusted! And it is that one who has betrayed me all along, and who gave me away to this Grimes—whoever that devil may be."

So ran the bitter reflections of the outlaw chief.

At that moment he cared more about the betrayal of his confidence than for the escape of the man he had been so-determined to destroy.

The companion of Hank Starr was revived from the stupor resulting from the stunning blow he had received. But he could throw no more light on the mystery of the betrayal than had the other guard.

Out upon the street went the bandit king. And from one to another of his men ran another command. It was this:

"Proclaim a reward for the discovery of Sodger Jim, alive!"

Then through the new town, with its dark and citizen-deserted streets, rang a weird cry:

"O-yez!—o-yez!—o-yez! One thousand dollars to the man who brings in Sodger Jim, alive and unhurt!"

There was more than one shady character who claimed residence in the town, and these, as well as the followers of Jesse James, heard and responded to this offer of reward. For they had not a doubt but that the promise of the James boys' leader would be fulfilled.

Meanwhile, Jesse had gone through the safe in the bank, and found that every dollar in cash, excepting a small quantity of cents and nickels, had been taken away from the bank by the cashier.

Amid the turmoil and peril, how had Grimes and his companions succeeded in avoiding, even for a brief length of time, the capture which seemed to lie in wait for them at every point?

The manner of their escape did credit to the nerve and craftiness of Grimes.

When he, with his assistants, made the break for liberty, his orders had been to fire no shots unless

absolutely necessary to save life. He knew that firing in that vicinity would call others to the spot, or be likely to do so. So some witness would be likely to escape and spread the alarm.

Thus had the sudden onslaught been made that knocked the outlaw guards insensible. Another who had been encountered outside was served in the same way. So had they gotten clear of the immediate vicinity of the bank. After that they went in a beeline toward one of the mountain barriers that walled the town.

One, only, lagged behind, because he could not keep up the pace.

That one was Sodger Jim!

CHAPTER XII.

JESSE JAMES' SPY.

Jesse James opened the doors of the bank, had the rooms lighted up, and proceeded to make that place his headquarters.

He had scarcely done this—and the hour was not much past midnight—before a shrinking and pleading individual was brought in by one of his men.

It was Sodger Jim!

Without a word Jesse James placed the amount of the promised reward in the hands of the outlaw who had performed the service. Then he dismissed the man, and so was the bum left alone, face to face with the one whom he had been compelled to betray.

The outlaw chief gazed at his prisoner for a full minute in silence. When he at last spoke, Jim started as if a pistol had been discharged close to his ear.

"Well, you are with me again, Sodger Jim," said the outlaw, a faintly mocking smile curling his bearded lips.

"Lawd!" quavered Jim.

"Brace up—I'm going to give you a chance to live and be happy. I'm going to give you all the whisky you will drink, and turn you loose to work at your old trade of beating after I am gone. How is that?"

"Lawd!—but I reckined ye'd skin me clean down to my naked liver!"

"No—I'm a mild-tempered man. I'm likewise of the sort to be easily persuaded and fooled. One, Grimes, has found that out—curse him. But you will talk a little, won't you, as a reward for my kindness?"

Jim did not know what to say, for the mood of Jesse James was entirely beyond his comprehension.

"What—what ye want me to say?" he asked.

"You carried a warning to Grimes, in the bank. That was a neat thing for you to do, and I expected it, and I like you devilish well for it! But I'm just a little curious about it, just the same. I want to know who is the friend of mine who sent you with the message. Will you tell me?"

Did Jesse James mean what he said? Jim asked himself.

Jesse looked serious, and Jim decided that it was all right. He was not a fool, but his fright had taken all the sense out of him.

"I s'pose I hadn't orter tell ye," he returned.

"I suppose you had orter, Sodger. Out with it. Whisky for the truth; a quicker and more merciful dose if you lie to me."

"It—it was that young feller."

"What young fellow?"

"Melton Gay."

The face of the bandit king was livid.

"He sent the message to Grimes?"

"Him and t'other feller with him."

"Who was the other?"

"Dave Wheeler."

"And both were on parole, and pledged! Curse them!"

Jim was silent.

"Was the message written?" Jesse asked, after a moment, when he seemed to have gained control of his feelings.

"Yas."

"Do you know what it said?"

"No."

"Where were they when they gave you the message?"

"Pretty nigh the postoffice."

"Can you tell me anything more about it?"

"I reckon that Grimes was surprised that he should be sarved so well by Melton Gay?"

"Likely he was. And so am I surprised. Have you seen Melton Gay since Grimes escaped?"

"Y-yas—onct—jest a glimpse."

"Did he have any more messages for you?"

"Nary a message."

"Very well. Now I think I am close to the secret as to who has been warning the town against me. Melton Gay is the man. But—whatever they may think here—he was not my spy. He got the secret from some one else. Ten thousand fiends!—would she do that thing? And is this girl—Mabel Grimes, as she calls herself—the one who for three years was the same as a daughter to me?"

Suddenly the outlaw chief paused in front of Jim, and demanded:

"Do you know where Mabel Grimes can be found? Gay took her off somewhere in the afternoon."

"I don't know. It might be out to Kimberly's."

"Where is that?"

"A house at the east end of the town. She and Grimes used to board there a spell ago."

"Show me the way, and amble along as fast as your legs will let you. Here—have a drink of this."

Jim snatched eagerly at the proffered flask, and he took a long pull at it. It put new life into his limbs,

and he felt like doing anything that Jesse James might ask of him.

He led the way to the dwelling where Melton Gay had left Mabel.

Here Jesse dismissed Sodger Jim, but not empty-handed, for he gave him his flask, with all that it contained.

There was a quick response to his knock. He did not wait to be asked in. He pushed the trembling woman aside, when she would have parleyed with him at the door. He dashed into the house, and pushed his way through room after room.

There was a low cry of terror, and he found himself confronted by Mabel Grimes.

The room was light, and her fear made her pale. Her luxuriant hair hung loose, for she had been combing it out. Her eyes were bright, and she looked five years younger than she had done when he saw her before, that afternoon, on the street. Indeed, at that time he had scarcely noticed her face, for he had not dreamed that she was one he had ever seen before, and her name was strange to him.

"Inez Morena!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, that was the name you knew me by, six years ago. But for three years I have been the adopted daughter of Noel Grimes. You need not ask me again who has been unfaithful as your spy. Could I see those I love robbed, and, perhaps, murdered? My heart failed me, and I flung away my scruples and revealed the plans which you in part confided to me in your letter asking me to tell you when the time was ripe for you to raid this town. I gave you the facts as you asked me, as I was pledged to do. Then I would have killed myself could I have recalled the mischief. All I could do was to warn them—and I did that. And yet, Jesse James, after you have taken my life as a forfeit, as I know you will now do, remember that in my heart I have loved you through all as if you were in reality my father, as you seemed to be for so long a time!"

Her voice broke, and she covered her face with her hands.

She expected to die at the hands of the fierce man before her, as surely as she expected that death must eventually come to her in any case.

For some time she stood with her head bowed and her eyes covered. She thought that she heard a movement on the part of the man before her. A moment later, she raised her face and looked.

A cry of amazement broke from her lips.

She was alone—the bandit king had left her, without even a word of reproach or the more deadly shot or blow!

But the vengeful impulses which had there been subdued by the memory of tender associations with the girl who had clung to him for protection as a child were not to be quenched in the breast of Jesse James.

Mounted on his horse, he raced along the principal street of the town, and his Winchester spit out a deadly message whenever he saw a skulking figure outside, or a shadow through a window within.

Dawn found the James boys in possession of three prisoners—Noel Grimes and two of his fellow defenders.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONCLUSION.

Noel Grimes had not been taken without having put up a good fight, and three of the outlaws had bitten the dust before he was forced to surrender.

Frank James and four companions, well mounted, rode in a complete circuit around the town. The latter was built in a narrow valley, and, as has before been stated, there were only two ways by which egress with horses could be obtained. And not many would have cared to risk an endless climbing of the crags, and threading a labyrinth of gorges, from which escape would be almost impossible, and starvation sure.

It was while attempting to make their way through what looked like a possible opening that Grimes and his companions had been surprised by Frank James.

Two of Grimes' comrades fell, not to rise again. Three of the outlaws went down, and it was Grimes who dropped every man of them. Then Frank James had closed with him, and there was a short, terrible struggle among the rocks.

The wound which Frank had received made the fight doubly painful to him; but it at the same time rendered him the more desperate, and Grimes quickly found that he had tackled a man who was more than a natural match for him in point of strength.

He gave up only when he felt the point of Frank James' knife at his throat.

It was so that the capture was made.

While these events were transpiring, and shortly after the departure of Jesse James from the presence of Mabel Grimes, Melton Gay and Dave Wheeler arrived at the house where Mabel was stopping.

In the interview which ensued between Mabel and Melton, the former told of the visit of Jesse James, and of the unexpected mercifulness shown by him.

Then, for the first time, she confided to the young man the whole truth, which he had before known only in part.

Long ago she had told him of her earlier life—of her having been left a waif in a town near the Kansas border—of the capture and killing of the drunken and abusive man who gave her the only home she then knew, by which event she had fallen into the hands of the James boys' gang.

She had been placed with an old negro woman by Jesse James, and abundant funds supplied by him for her care and education. He came often to the

humble dwelling, and up to the age of thirteen she had known in him that which came nearest to a father's love of anything in her experience.

In those days the stern bandit chief often indulged in a frolic with the beautiful little Inez Morena. And so had she known, perhaps, as few others in the world ever knew, that there was a gentle and genial side to the nature of the man who was the terror of the border.

So much, as well as of the less interesting circumstances under which she came to be adopted by Noel Grimes, had been confided to Melton Gay. And it was by this means that he became aware that Jesse James had a better side to his nature.

Gay had personally met the bandit king two years before the date of these events, under circumstances which made them almost friendly for the time being. Without knowing who he was, Melton had then done Jesse James a personal favor, such as many men, strangers to each other, may at times require.

Now Mabel—as she should more properly be called—told Melton Gay the rest of the truth.

Since separating from Jesse James, whose bounty she no longer required, she had kept up an occasional correspondence with him of a friendly character. When she had learned of schemes for his capture she had not hesitated to warn him of them, believing that it was a duty due to one who had been so much to her, and who had never refused her a kindness.

But it was after she had come to the new town that he for the first time required of her a service approximating to that of a spy. He had asked her to inform him concerning the defensive condition of the town, and the prospects of obtaining a good haul if he should make an attempt.

She had given him much information, but it was with the understanding that he would not take life, unless it were actually in self-defense, and that he should spare the lives of any who should fall into his hands.

During their correspondence she had been addressed as Inez Morena, and, while he knew that she was under the guardianship of a wealthy friend, she had, from motives of prudence, never told him the name. On the other hand, she did not know that Noel Grimes was a Secret Service detective.

This explains the singular complications which led up to the dramatic events which have been recorded.

When she told Melton of the fact that she had, even though reluctantly and in a modified way, acted as the spy of Jesse James, it was almost with a fear that he would despise her for it.

But no such impulse for a moment entered his heart.

* * * * *

As dawn broke over the terror-ridden town, three

men were lined up in front of the building which had been the bank.

They were helplessly bound, and at the head of the short line stood Noel Grimes, the man of nerve.

A pole was procured, and two outlaws held this over the heads of the prisoners. The hands of the latter were released, and they were required to grasp the pole in such a way as to maintain its position above their heads.

Then their legs were bound, and from within the bank building a man stepped, revolver in hand.

His face was completely hidden by a mask. He confronted the doomed men, and there was a silence, broken only by terrified breathing sounds from two of them.

The face of Noel Grimes was pale, but it wore a faint mocking smile, which the stare of death had not the power to banish.

Bang! One of the prisoners hung heavy on the pole. Bang! A second one swayed at the opposite end of the pole.

With arms of iron, Grimes kept them from falling.

Then a wild scream rang on the air, and Mabel Grimes dashed through the line of outlaws and flung herself upon her adopted father, clinging to him and helping to support him with her arms.

Bang!—a third shot from the revolver of the masked Jesse James. And Noel Grimes fell, the shot having passed within an inch of the breast of Mabel.

Then the outlaws, in response to a sharp command from their leader, leaped into their saddles and rode furiously out of the town which they had corralled twenty-four hours before—firing in the air as they departed.

Grimes was not mortally wounded, and Mabel in time nursed him back to health.

The James boys had found the greater part of the bank treasure, in the shape of paper money, on the person of Grimes, and so made a rich haul, after all.

Without adequate leadership, no effective pursuit of the outlaws was attempted, and it was some time before the town was restored to a condition of prosperity.

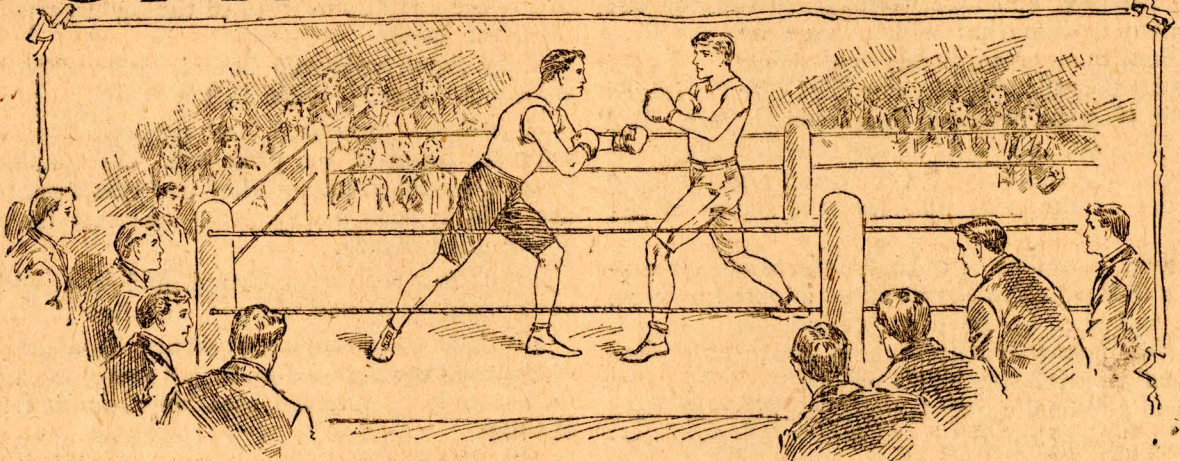
The marriage of Melton Gay and Mabel was the first wedding celebrated in the new town. And the secret service officer was not inclined to interpose an objection.

But he never knew that it was his adopted daughter who had been the secret spy of Jesse James.

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 45, will contain, The James Boys' Brotherhood; or, The Men of Mystery. How Jesse recruits a new gang and some of their thrilling adventures. An experience in the great outlaw's life never before related. Read it, boys.

BOXING CONTEST



Keep it up, boys! Those stories that came in last week were corkers. They came in in bunches, too. This contest has opened with a big spurt. Don't let it slow up. We have received some of the best and most up-to-date boxing stories ever seen anywhere. Here are a few rattling good ones.

A Fight for the Championship.

(By Eric H. Palmer, New York.)

During the summer of 1900 I was a member of the B. S. A. C., a club composed of boys, whose ages ranged between ten and sixteen years. They participated in almost every sport and exercise, and one of these was the "manly art"—boxing.

Boxing matches between the members were held almost every day. Soon it was discovered that two boys, Calvin Hosmer and Frank Adams, were able to defeat their fellow-members with surprising ease. Both were as quick as lightning, and could deliver the punch.

At last Calvin challenged Frank. The latter at once accepted, and all the members of the club prepared for a most exciting bout. It would be for the championship of the club. July 27th was the day appointed for the bout. I was chosen referee.

Calvin and Frank had been training every day, and were in excellent condition when the time came to step into the ring.

Both were fit to fight the battle of their lives.

They were dressed in neat suits, such as worn in boxing bouts. I stepped into the ring.

The time had come! The witnesses, gathering closely around the ring, were breathless with suppressed excitement.

"Shake hands!" I ordered, and Calvin and Frank met in the center of the ring.

"Time!" I called, when the cheers for each fighter had ceased.

The fight began. Calvin kept moving his hands up and down for perhaps a minute, and then suddenly shot out his left fist. His opponent was keenly watching, however, and the blow was blocked. Another was dealt in return. It struck Calvin lightly on the cheek, and those who favored Frank's chances of victory gave a shout. But their exclamations of joy and delight soon turned to groans of disappointment. Calvin succeeded in passing Frank's guard, and Frank received a terrific

blow on the jaw, which caused him to nearly leap from the floor.

"A corker!" was the cry.

Calvin followed his opponent up. Frank met him half-way, and dealt him a quick blow on the chest. A few seconds of footwork ensued.

"Time!" I exclaimed, for the first round was over.

The second round began with a lively exchange of blows, both heavy and light. For a minute science was thrown to the winds, and King Pummel reigned. The spectators were delighted.

Crack! Calvin received a terrific blow over the left eye, and became a student of astronomy.

Biff! Revenge is sweet, and so Calvin thought when he hit Frank a hard blow in return.

Suddenly Frank seemed to slip and Calvin darted at him to give him a punch. But Frank sprang up, and dealt Calvin a blow which stretched him on the floor.

Calvin's head struck the floor with a resounding thump, and I counted him out. Frank Adams had won a fight for the championship.

A Three-round Bout.

(By Gerald Lewis, Conn.)

"Yes," I said, "I think I can outbox you." I was speaking to Samuel Travis, a boy two years older than myself, who was celebrated for his prowess as an athlete.

He laughed.

"Don't boast," he said. "I'll box with you to-night in my barn."

"Agreed!" I cried.

That night over twenty boys were assembled in the barn to see the boxing match. We cleared an open space in the middle for a ring. The barn was lighted by three big stable lanterns which we suspended from a rafter directly over the ring.

Samuel took off his coat and vest and rolled up his sleeves. I did the same.

I confess that when I looked at his broad shoulders and brawny arms I was a little bit frightened.

"If he should ever land on my jaw with one of those great fists!" I thought. But what was the use of thinking about it. It was too late to back out now. I must do my best—win or lose.

"Time!"

It was the call of the boy we had chosen for referee. It roused me from my stupor.

I arose to my feet and faced Travis. For a moment we faced each other, feinting and looking for an opening to land. He advanced slowly, backing me into one corner. Then he led.

Heavens! that fist shot past my head with the speed of a steam engine. I barely dodged it and landed lightly in return. All my nervousness had left me now.

I danced around Travis, leaping in to land a light blow now and then.

I could see that his temper was up. Lowering his head, he rushed at me with a terrible left swing.

Instead of moving back, I rushed forward to meet him. I knew that his swinging fist would fan the air somewhere behind me, while only his arm would strike me.

If he had struck a straight blow I would have leaped back.

My calculations were correct. There I was inside his guard. I pressed one glove against his right arm to block any blow he might aim at me. Then rising on my toes, I hooked my left fist to his chin. He fell to the floor.

The bout was over in one round. I had proved that I was no boaster.

Finlay's Victory.

(By John Summers, Mass.)

George Finlay was a slim, pale boy, not by any means athletic-looking. No one would ever have suspected him of being a skillful boxer. He looked as though he would be an "easy mark" for any boy who put on the gloves with him.

So thought Will Dawson, a boy in George's class at school. Will had a set of boxing gloves and was very fond of trying his skill with various boys of his acquaintance. He generally was successful in these little boxing matches, but once in a while he ran up against a Tartar.

One day he boxed with a boy somewhat older than himself and received a black eye. This made the other boys in the class laugh at him, and Dawson was very angry. He decided to persuade Finlay to box with him.

"He will not be able to hurt me," he thought, "and I will give him such a beating that the other boys will stop making fun of me."

To his surprise, Finlay agreed readily to his proposal that they should box.

It was a pleasant afternoon, and the two boys, followed by a group of their companions, wended their way to a grassy corner of the school yard.

There they divested themselves of their coats, collars and neckties and donned the padded boxing gloves.

One boy who had a watch was proclaimed timekeeper, while the oldest and biggest boy in the class was chosen for referee.

Then the two boys faced each other.

"Just in fun," said Dawson. "We won't hit hard."

"All right," said Finlay.

Dawson edged nearer to Finlay, who easily kept out of distance. He determined to hit as hard as he could, and had spoken as he did in order to mislead his opponent. He was a treacherous boy at heart.

"Bang!"

He had struck Finlay with all the strength in his body. The blow landed on the smaller boy's forehead.

Down he went in a heap.

There was a cry from all the boys round the ring.

"One, two, three, four, five——" counted the referee. But Finlay was on his feet again. There was a look of grim determination on his pale face.

He dashed forward.

Dawson was bewildered by the shower of blows that was rained upon him. He tried to hit back, but his blows never landed. Now they were avoided, now blocked. Wherever he turned he could not get away from Finlay, who was still sending in stinging blows.

Crack!

Finlay had landed a left on his nose. It felt as if it was crushed.

Dawson buried his head in his arms and tried to avoid the stinging rain of blows.

Bang! bang!

Two more had landed on his chin.

"Let me go!" he screamed, "I'm licked."

He dropped on his knees as if to beg for mercy.

"Get up, you coward," said Finlay, drawing his gloves off. "Learn by this not to take an unfair advantage of an opponent."

Champion of the School.

(By Clarence Sandford, Vt.)

At the boarding-school which I attended we held a boxing tournament every year. I entered it with but little hope of coming out a winner.

I had to box three different boys.

We boxed three rounds to each bout.

The first two rounds were of two minutes each, and the third and last round lasted three minutes. The boxing, of course, was for points. The boy who landed the greatest number of clean blows being proclaimed victor.

I found my first two opponents easy. They were slow and clumsy, and as I had a long reach I landed on them almost at will. My third opponent, however, was a corker. He was reputed to be the best boxer in the school, and the championship for this year depended on the result of our bout.

The first two rounds were slow. We were both careful—sparring and feinting the greater part of the time, fighting at long range and landing very few blows.

In the third round, however, my opponent decided to hurry matters a little. He rushed into me like a whirlwind. I fought back, but I saw that I was being outpointed.

"Crack."

He had struck me on the jaw and I fell to the ground. I looked up at him. I saw that he had lost his temper. He drew back his arm and struck me as I lay on the ground.

Then the referee—one of our teachers—rushed in and forced him to his corner.

I am now champion of the school. My opponent forfeited the victory for striking me while I was down.

TALES OF HUNTING AND TRAPPING.

HOW DAVID CUMMIDGE KILLED A CATAMOUNT.

THE STORY OF A 14-YEAR-OLD BOY'S DARING.

In the year 17—, Ezekiel Cummidge, the father of our hero, at that time a resident of Portsmouth, N. H., received, under sanction of the Crown, a small grant of land lying within the limits of the towns of Ossipee and Sandwich, situated a little to the east of north from Winnipiseogee Lake, which, in the aboriginal language, is, "The smile of the Great Spirit."

No more beautiful lake ever existed than this same Winnipiseogee, with its three hundred and sixty-five fairy-like islands.

A winter or two preceding the conferment of the grant, Ezekiel Cummidge, in company with an Ossipee chief named Wyatan, had made a wide circuit of the lake in one of their moose-hunting expeditions, which brought them into the fertile and picturesque region which comprises the present site of Ossipee and Sandwich.

After obtaining the coveted grant, Ezekiel Cummidge and his family, consisting of himself, wife and four children—Martha, the eldest, a red-cheeked brunette of sixteen or seventeen, old enough at all events, to have a lover in the bashful person of a shipbuilder's apprentice; David, the hero of the present sketch, two years younger, and two smaller ones—started on foot, all but the two youngest, who were permitted to occupy space in the one-horse cart, which contained their store of provisions and agricultural utensils necessary to the comfort of a pioneer settler.

The distance to the "new grant" was about seventy miles, through an almost unbroken wilderness—traversed at that time only by the hunter and roving savage.

But Ezekiel Cummidge felt quite secure from all peril in connection with his aboriginal neighbors, so long as he had the friendly promise of protection from the manly and true-hearted chief, Wyatan.

The site selected by a majority of the Cummidges for the erection of their cabin was on the northern margin of a little sheet of water, now dignified by the title of "Ossipee Lake."

Here Ezekiel Cummidge pitched his canvas tent, and with the assistance of his family, commenced the erection of a small log cabin, and a cow shed.

When completed, there was but one window to the cabin, containing half a dozen panes of glass—which was, indeed, a rarity.

The cow shed, which was built first, for the protection

of the stock from the encroachments of wild beasts, was located about twenty yards from the cabin. There was no entrance to this, except by a narrow door and a small lintel window, about a foot and a half square. This was securely closed in the night time by a heavy plank slide, so that no wild animal could possibly find ingress while the family were asleep.

They knew well that the mountains were infested with wild beasts of every description known to our northern wilds.

They had lost two of their sheep, and a sucking pig, before they were able to properly shelter their stock; but now that the shed was completed, as well as the cabin, they felt more secure.

Of nights, the horrid concert of the brute world went on, reaching far up the mountains.

One evening, a few days after the completion of their cabin, while seated in a family group, Martha, who was nearest the small window, uttered a wild shriek of terror, and dropped from the stool on which she was seated in actual convulsions.

The whole family sprang to their feet in a state of nervous alarm, and glanced anxiously about them to ascertain the cause of Martha's terrible fright.

It was soon apparent to every one, for on looking hastily in a line with the little square window, a sight greeted their startled visions well calculated to curdle the heart's blood of even the boldest. Erect upon its hind legs stood a fierce, wild beast of the cat species, of a tawny-brown color, and of enormous size. Its huge forepaws rested on the narrow window-sill—just barely wide enough to admit of its entrance if it felt disposed to make the attempt.

For an instant all were paralyzed, but the senior Cummidge was the first to recover self-command. His first impulse was to seize his musket, hanging against the wall; but a second thought changed his determination, and he called to the little house-dog, Tip, who was barking furiously at the unwelcome visitor.

The sagacious animal instantly comprehended the intention of his master, and immediately followed him to the door.

With trembling fingers, Ezekiel Cummidge raised the wooden latch, and opened the door just wide enough to admit of the exit of the dog.

No sooner did Tip perceive the opening made for him

than he darted out, spitfire-like, into the darkness, making an instant and heroic assault upon the monster, who dropped from the window like a flash, and as quickly picked up his puny but plucky assailant, who yelled and ki-ied frantically when he found himself fast in the toils of the mountain monster.

Closing and barring the door, the frightened pioneer seized a small table, and, elevating it to the window, held it there for some minutes by main strength, till the occasional yelps of the ill-fated Tip, growing fainter and fainter in the distance, convinced him that the terrible beast was making off to the mountain with his prey.

With thanksgiving of praise the little family then ascended to the attic by means of a ladder, and carefully securing the trap, they resigned themselves to sleep, and in dreams, the most of them saw the frightful episode of the evening vividly re-enacted.

The next morning they tracked the bloody monster to the foot of the mountain by drops of blood and bits of hide, which had once assisted in making up the physical sum total of poor Tip.

A portion of the ensuing day was spent in securely barricading the window, which was done by nailing strong cross-bars of hard wood to the logs athwart the opening by means of solid iron spikes, which no human or brute force could have power to remove.

There was little doubt in the settler's mind but the visit of the previous evening would be repeated on the succeeding night; and so, after their frugal supper, and the candles had been lighted, the old flint-lock musket was taken down and carefully primed, after being re-loaded with heavy slugs, and the Cummidges—father and son—took up their station in the cow shed to watch for the anticipated arrival of the monster.

The slide to the lintel aperture was shoved back, so as to permit an unobstructed view of the intervening space leading to the cabin, so that no animal could advance in that direction without attracting their special notice.

"Davie!" said the senior, after they were inside the shed, and the door securely fastened, "you may stand the first two hours' watch, but if you see the beast be sure and awaken me the very instant you discover it. Don't by any means fire at the varmint, for you are only a boy, my son, and your aim, in consequence, cannot be very sure."

Master David, like most boys of his age, had considerable confidence in his own prowess; but he promised, nevertheless, strict compliance with his father's injunction.

Consoled by the promise of our youthful hero, the senior Cummidge stretched himself out on the floor, and was soon sound asleep—as his melodious snoring would have indicated to less practiced ears than those of Master David.

"My eye!" soliloquized our youthful hero, glancing sharply through the narrow aperture, "dad thinks I dun know how to shoot; but I reckon I does, a few. Let the varmint jest come along, now, and see if I don't—

by Jerusalem Grundy! Sp'ose c'ause I'm a boy I can't see straight, nor do nothin'. I guesses that ain't so—no how, whatsoever! And if the pesky varmint do come, I'll jest show dad a trick worth seein'—I will, that, by Grundy!"

As young David stood with the silvery moonlight from the narrow aperture irradiating his handsome face, you could see there was no lack of courage and determination in his manly expression. With the old musket cleverly poised in his impatient hand—vigilant and watchful as a lynx—as he stood thus, proud and resolute, he looked every inch the youthful hero.

"I reckon it's about time the varmint comed along, I do, by Grundy!" mused the courageous Davie, growing momentarily more impatient at the protracted delay. "But howsomever it do go, I won't call dad—that's flat! I'll hang out till morning fust—I will, by—"

His exclamation was cut short by a dark object creeping stealthily through the long grass in the direction of the cabin. There could be no doubt as to the identity of the nocturnal visitor, or its blood-hungry purpose in coming.

With a thrill of pleasure Master David watched its cat-like advance, stealthy, and silent, and treacherously bent upon mischief—and grasping his slug-laden musket with a firmer hand—the pupils of his eyes dilating and gleaming with a purplish luster that deepened perceptibly into an intenser and deadlier light—he forced the rusty barrel noiselessly through the narrow aperture, and made ready for the fitting moment to fire.

In the meantime the crawling monster made its way directly to the cabin, and paused before the little window, from which the light of the interior still gave out a faint reflection. The next moment it rose erect on its hind legs, placing its huge paws upon the window-sill, as upon the preceding night.

As the fierce brute stood, it presented to David from his narrow port-hole in the lintel a most inviting target.

Our youthful hero, in taking aim, unintentionally made a very slight noise, sufficient to attract the attention of the monster, which turned its head with an angry snarl in his direction, presenting two fiery orbs, which gleamed like living coals of fire.

It was an opportunity not to be neglected, and David hastily pulled the trigger.

There was a loud explosion, and the maddened brute made a wild leap of full thirty feet in the direction of the cowshed, and then plunged forward, biting and tearing the earth furiously in its death agony.

The noise of the musket awakened the senior Cummidge just in season to witness its expiring throes.

It proved to be a catamount of the largest size, measuring ten feet from tip to tip.

"Well done, Davie, my boy!" said Ezekiel, proudly. "I couldn't 'a' done better myself!"

The Plumage Hunter.

Not very long ago the writer accompanied a gold-mining expedition into the tropical forests of Guiana, and stumbled across an English traveler who was collecting birds for a London and Parisian firm of merchants. He

was settled in a village of Acawois Indians, far from any of the haunts of the white man. Every male Indian of the village was in his service, and at the conclusion of each week they received pay, according to results, in cheap knives, powder, hatchets, cooking utensils, etc., pay day being usually celebrated by a feast, in which all the men got fearfully intoxicated on a filthy compound called paiwarri.

We started out every morning immediately after breakfast. The Indians were armed with bows and arrows and blow-pipes. The collector divided them into sections, and sent them off into the bush, himself accompanying one group, but without doing any shooting. I fastened on to a man and a boy, and kept close in their wake all day. With the skill of a denizen of the woods, my man did not walk a step without rousing a feathered creature of some sort. Sometimes a large bird—a toucan or a macaw—would flap clumsily out of a bush, and the twang of the bow-string would announce its death. Small birds fluttered across our path constantly, and these were promptly brought down with the pipe. Now and then a flight of a score or two would suddenly settle all over in the branches about our heads, and on these occasions the Indian managed to kill a dozen or so before they appeared to realize their danger. It was kill, kill, kill, without a moment's pause. As the birds fell, the boy secured the bodies and dropped them into a long wicker basket, which was strapped across his forehead and hung down his back.

On our return to the village the men were coming in and emptying their baskets on to a long table in the middle of the Englishman's hut. Many of the birds were of the most brilliant plumage; but there were hundreds of birds, not boasting any brightness of color, that were of no use. The slaughter, in fact, is much greater in regard to the birds that are not wanted than those which reach the English market. The collector, stripped to the shirt, and with his sleeves rolled up, set to work at once, going through the game. He handled every bird, dropping those pretty enough for a bonnet or valuable enough for a collection into one heap, and the useless ones into another. Not more than one bird in ten was retained; the rest had been slaughtered uselessly. When I reproached my friend with this wanton waste of feathered life, he replied that he could not attempt to kill the birds himself, and it was impossible to get Indians to discriminate between valuable and worthless specimens.

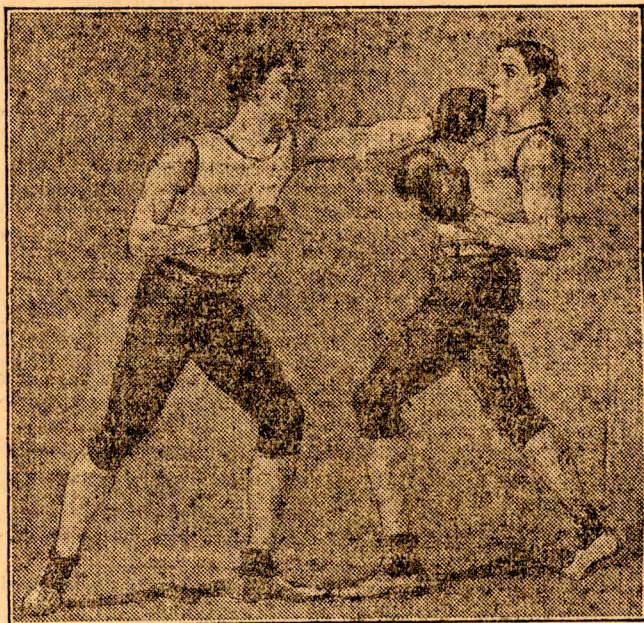
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